

COLLEGE FOOTBALL 2016

STANFORD
RUNNING BACK

**CHRISTIAN
McCAFFREY**

WILL BREAK YOU
LIKE A RECORD

128

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Picks

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HEY, TOLEDO, TEXAS A&M, THE STANFORD TREE, MISSISSIPPI STATE, CALIFORNIA, UNLV, MIAMI-FLORIDA, ARKANSAS, MARSHALL, KNOXVILLE BOATERS, UCLA, ARKANSAS STATE, APPALACHIAN STATE, VIRGINIA TECH, THE DRUMMER FOR THE WORLD'S LARGEST DRUM, GEORGIA SOUTHERN, BOWLING GREEN, SUPER FROG, NORTHERN ILLINOIS, BRIGHAM YOUNG, FAYETTEVILLE HOG CALLERS, WASHINGTON, ARIZONA, RUF/NEKS, WEST VIRGINIA, AUBURN, DUKE, BOISE STATE, HAWAII HAKA DANCERS, ARIZONA STATE, PENN STATE, SAN DIEGO STATE, IOWA PINK LOCKER ROOM PAINTERS, "THE U," OHIO, OREGON STATE, IDAHO, LOUISIANA-MONROE, OREGON UNIFORM DESIGNERS, NEW MEXICO STATE, HAWAII, WYOMING, CENTRAL FLORIDA, THE TALLAHASSEE SOD CEMETERY GARDENER, KENT STATE, NORTH TEXAS, KANSAS, ARMY, ANN ARBOR KHAKI PANTS WHOLESALERS, CHARLOTTE, EASTERN MICHIGAN, MEMPHIS, PITTSBURGH, NEBRASKA, NEVADA, COLORADO STATE, KENTUCKY, AUBURN TOILET PAPER VENDORS, MISSOURI, AKRON, AIR FORCE, PERSON WHO SITS SHOTGUN IN THE RAMBLIN' WRECK, UTAH STATE, INDIANA, WESTERN MICHIGAN, LOUISVILLE, SOUTH FLORIDA, TEXAS TECH, LIL' RED, NORTH CAROLINA STATE, USC SONG GIRLS, LOUISIANA TECH, CINCINNATI, TEXAS, LEE CORSO, SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI, COLORADO, KANSAS STATE, MINNESOTA, SAN JOSE STATE, GEORGIA STATE, DABO'S DANCE INSTRUCTOR, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE, CENTRAL MICHIGAN, IOWA STATE,

MADISON JUMP AROUNDERS, TEXAS SAN ANTONIO, MIAMI-
OHIO, FLORIDA ATLANTIC, PURDUE, SOUTHERN METHODIST,
SPARTY, TULANE, BALL STATE, TEXAS STATE, GEORGIA
TECH, VIRGINIA, TBDBITL, NEW MEXICO, CONNECTICUT, BIG
AL, ALBERT, ALBERTA, TEXAS EL PASO, RICE, VANDERBILT,
KIRK HERBSTREIT, RUTGERS, BUFFALO, BERKELEY CARD
TURNERS, SOUTH CAROLINA, TULSA, RALPHIE THE BUFFALO,
ILLINOIS, SOUTH ALABAMA, WAKE FOREST, SYRACUSE,
MARYLAND, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL, EAST CAROLINA,
TROY, THE DEMON DEACON'S MOTORCYCLE MECHANIC,
LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE, OLD DOMINION, FRESNO STATE,
BOSTON COLLEGE, MASSACHUSETTS, WASHINGTON STATE,
THE WASHINGTON STATE GAMEDAY FLAG, GEORGIA, WESTERN
KENTUCKY, WISCONSIN, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, TEMPLE,
TENNESSEE, COLLEGE STATION KISSERS, UTAH, NAVY, LSU,
FLORIDA, HOUSTON, BAYLOR, OKLAHOMA STATE, OREGON,
ATHENS HEDGE TRIMMERS, MICHIGAN, NORTHWESTERN, OLE
MISS, TCU, UNC, FLORIDA STATE, NOTRE DAME, BEVO, OHIO
STATE, STANFORD, IOWA, OKLAHOMA, MICHIGAN STATE,
CLEMSON, ALABAMA, **ARE YOU READY? YOUR ROAD TO THE
COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF BEGINS LABOR DAY WEEKEND.**

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IN
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COLLEGE

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Samaje Perine



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A QUALITY WIN-WIN

Everyone knew the playoff would make January shine, but who could've guessed it would make September look so good too? BY HEATHER DINICH

Thank you, College Football Playoff, for inspiring more fall Saturdays like the one coming up on Sept. 3.

USC opens the season against defending national champ Alabama. Last year's runner-up, Clemson, faces Auburn. Oklahoma, a 2015 semifinalist, takes on potential playoff crasher Houston. Notre Dame visits Texas, while Wisconsin and LSU square off at historic Lambeau Field.

"There are some big games," says selection committee member Barry Alvarez. "That's the way it should be." Amen.

The committee has made it clear: Man up and schedule up. The CFP has challenged not just athletic directors but entire conferences to flex their scheduling muscles. And while strength of schedule isn't the only factor used to determine the Top 25—CFP executive director Bill Hancock would be quick to point out that no criteria are weighted in this oh-so-subjective system—it is certainly one of the most oft-referenced and concrete measures the committee can point to when justifying its weekly rankings.

It's why a one-loss Bama was slotted in at No. 4 in the first CFP Top 25 last Nov. 3, ahead of four unbeaten Power 5 teams. It's why a one-loss Houston hit its ceiling at No. 18. And it's why the Sooners punched their semifinal ticket despite having fallen to 5-7 Texas.

"When we're comparing schools, we throw [strength of schedule] right up on the screen," Alvarez says. "Who had they played, what their opponents' records were. That's very important, your quality wins."

Which means fans should enjoy a philosophical scheduling shift toward more big September Saturdays.

Witness: The Big 12 has mandated that all schools (Baylor too!) play one noncon against the Power 5 or Notre Dame, effective as soon as existing contracts allow. The SEC too must face a Power 5 or "major independent" starting this year, while the ACC adopts a similar scheduling decree in 2017.

And here's what's fun about it: Losing is OK. No, really!

From 1998 to 2013, only 13 out of the 32 teams that vied for the BCS championship entered the title game with a regular-season loss. In the fledgling playoff era? Six of eight playoff teams have done so.

"You can recover," Alvarez says.

Just look at two-loss Stanford.

Thanks to "body-clock" issues, or just a dialed-in Northwestern, the Cardinal fell to the Cats in Evanston in Week 1 last year ... then beat Notre Dame, won the Pac-12 and, despite a loss to Oregon, finished in the conversation for a playoff spot at No. 6 in the CFP's final ranking.

"It allows there to be more than just a statistical analysis," says Stanford coach David Shaw. "That those conversations happen makes me feel a lot better. Forget about for us but for college football."

Of course, not every team is scheduling for the CFP—many are simply after an easy W and the six-win mark. But for the 25 programs (give or take) realistically vying for the sport's biggest prize, the importance of at least trying to beat one of their own is officially a movement.

"I think we'll see more challenging schedules in the near future," says Oklahoma AD Joe Castiglione. "But as much as everybody would love to see marquee nonconference games every single week, we have to realize that the difficulty of the conference schedule is always tough, regardless of what conference and what year." In other words: What's best for the fan isn't always best for the fan's team.

The key, he says, is striking a balance in the schedule, highlighted by one blockbuster opponent. Here comes the tricky part, though: It's a guessing game. Athletic directors often schedule as much as a decade in advance, so there is no way to guarantee an opponent will be top-five or even top-25 material. Strength of schedule also evolves throughout the season as opponents' résumés change. What might look like a big win in September can morph into a shrug come November.

Clemson AD Dan Radakovich knows those potential pitfalls well. He's on the committee. His program played for the 2015 title. And he has a formula: two Power 5 opponents (one of which is always rival South Carolina), one Group of 5 team and one in-state FCS squad.

"It shows that you're going out and trying to play at the highest level of the FBS, which is the Power 5 group," he says. "In any particular year, you have to be fortunate as your body of work is looked at. Were the teams you played really good?"

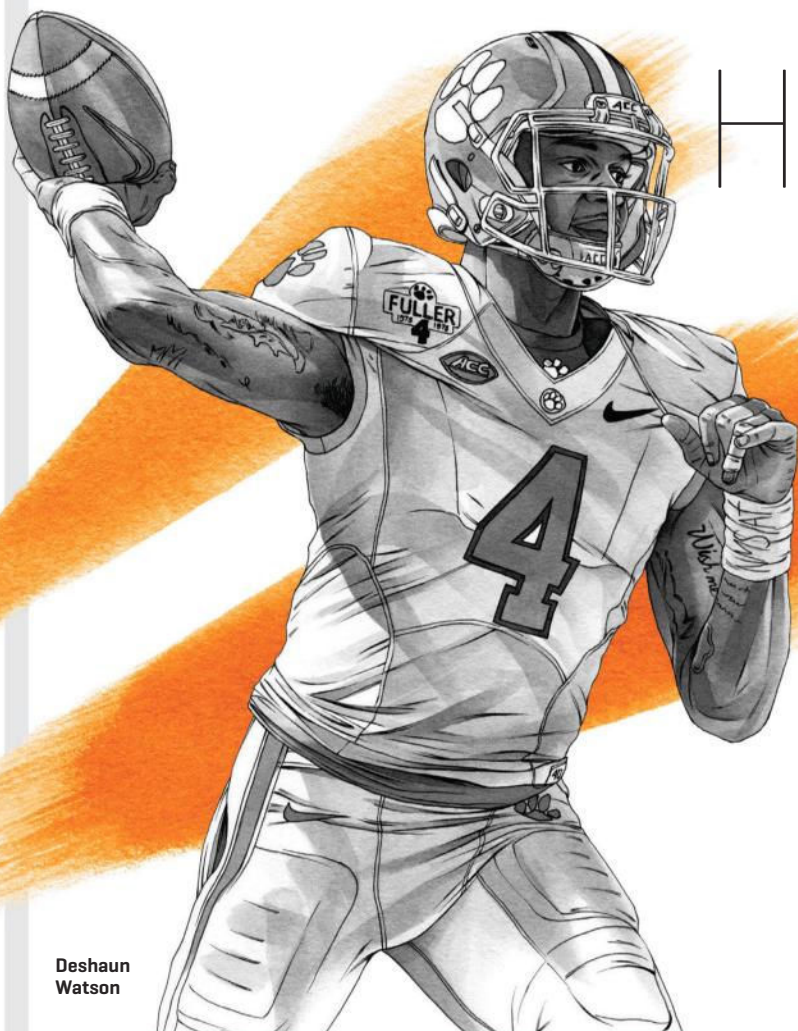
Many top-ranked teams playing on Sept. 3 will answer yes—win or lose. And that, ultimately, will be a victory for everyone.



WHY SETTLE FOR A SINGLE
GOOD CUP OF COFFEE,
WHEN YOU CAN HAVE A GOOD CUP OF COFFEE
EVERY SINGLE TIME.

EACH MAXWELL HOUSE BLEND IS SELECTED FROM
FIVE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEANS, SO EVERY
DELICIOUS CUP IS **GOOD TO THE LAST DROP.**

HEISMAN HOPEFULS



Deshaun
Watson

Last year Derrick Henry crashed the quarterbacks' Heisman House party. Now two other bruising running backs and one of the most versatile backs in college football history will challenge a duo of dual-threat QBs for the 2016 Heisman Trophy.

BY MARK SCHLABACH

POSITION AWARDS

DAVEY O'BRIEN:
TOP QB

Deshaun Watson
Clemson
Baker Mayfield
Oklahoma
J.T. Barrett
Ohio State

DOAK WALKER:
TOP RB

Christian McCaffrey
Stanford
Leonard Fournette
LSU
Dalvin Cook
Florida State

BILETNIKOFF:
TOP WR

JuJu Smith-Schuster
USC
Calvin Ridley
Alabama
Mike Williams
Clemson

**NAGURSKI /
BEDNARIK:**
TOP DEFENDER

DE Myles Garrett
Texas A&M
LB Raekwon McMillan
Ohio State
LB Jabrill Peppers
Michigan

**LOMBARDI
AWARD: TOP LB/
LINEMAN**

DE Myles Garrett
Texas A&M
DE Derek Barnett
Tennessee
OT Zach Banner
USC

DESHAUN WATSON

CLEMSON QB, JR.

2015 STATS

333-of-491, 4,104
yards, 35 TDs, 13
INTs; 207 carries,
1,105 yards, 12 TDs

Less than one year removed from a serious knee injury, Watson led Clemson to an undefeated regular season and a spot in the CFP national championship as a sophomore. Can he lead the Tigers to a title as an encore?

CHRISTIAN McCAFFREY

STANFORD RB, JR.

2015 STATS

337 rushes,
2,019 yards, 8 TDs;
45 catches for
645 yards, 5 TDs;
2 passing TDs;
2 return TDs

If McCaffrey didn't play out West, he might have won the Heisman last season, when he became the first FBS player since 1996 to top 1,500 rushing yards, 500 receiving yards and 1,000 yards on kickoff returns in a single season.

BAKER MAYFIELD

OKLAHOMA QB, SR.

2015 STATS

269-of-395, 3,700
yards, 36 TDs, 7 INTs;
141 carries, 405
yards, 7 TDs

Mayfield has played with a sizable chip on his shoulder since not being offered a Big 12 scholarship out of high school, then earning and losing a starting job at Texas Tech before transferring. He'll again be highly motivated after he was passed over as a Heisman finalist last season.

LEONARD FOURNETTE

LSU RB, JR.

2015 STATS

300 carries, 1,953
yards, 22 TDs;
19 catches, 253
yards, 1 TD

Fournette was a Heisman snub last season after a November swoon, including just 31 yards at Alabama. He still gained 1,953 yards with 22 touchdowns, but the Tigers will have to throw the ball more effectively to prevent him from fading down the stretch again.

DALVIN COOK

FSU RB, JR.

2015 STATS

229 carries, 1,691
yards, 19 TDs;
24 catches, 244
yards, 1 TD

Cook ran for 1,691 yards last season despite struggling with injuries that caused him to miss most of two games. If FSU is going to unseat Clemson in the ACC and return to the playoff, Cook will have to be the catalyst.



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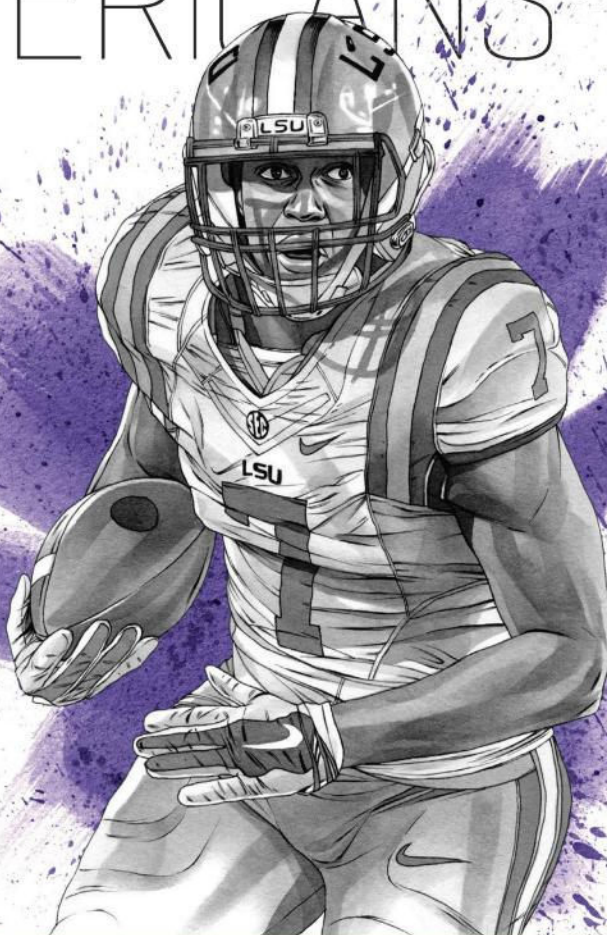
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PRESEASON ALL-AMERICANS

The SEC is once again king—Alabama's 2015 national title was the league's eighth in 10 seasons—but it can surely see a challenger coming in its rearview mirror. The Big Ten boasts more of my All-Americans (eight) than any other conference.

BY MARK SCHLABACH



Leonard Fournette

OFFENSE

- QB **Deshaun Watson**, Jr., Clemson
 RB **Leonard Fournette**, Jr., LSU
 RB **Dalvin Cook**, Jr., Florida State
 WR **JuJu Smith-Schuster**, Jr., USC
 ○ Smith-Schuster lit up secondaries in his first two years, including 1,454 yards in 2015, third most in USC history.
 WR **Calvin Ridley**, So., Alabama
 ○ Ridley set a Crimson Tide freshman record with 1,045 receiving yards on 89 catches with seven touchdowns.
 TE **Jake Butt**, Sr., Michigan
 ○ The Wolverines' NFL-ready receiver passed up the draft after catching 51 balls in Jim Harbaugh's offense.
 C **Kyle Fuller**, Sr., Baylor
 ○ After 26 consecutive starts on a dominant line, Fuller will have four new starters alongside him this season.
 T **Zach Banner**, Sr., USC
 T **Roderick Johnson**, Jr., Florida State
 ○ Johnson won the ACC's Jacobs Blocking Trophy in Dalvin Cook's school-record 1,691-yard season in 2015.
 G **Pat Elflein**, Sr., Ohio State
 G **Dan Feeney**, Sr., Indiana
 ○ Feeney is so dominant he didn't give up a sack on 475 pass plays in 2015 and has allowed only one in 37 starts.

DEFENSE

- DE **Myles Garrett**, Jr., Texas A&M
 ○ Warning to QBs: Garrett said his 12½ sacks and 19½ tackles for loss in 2015 added up to a "sophomore slump."
 DE **Jonathan Allen**, Sr., Alabama
 DT **Malik McDowell**, Jr., Michigan State
 ○ McDowell (6-6, 275) has the size and strength to play in the middle of the line and the speed to play on the edge.
 LB **Jabrill Peppers**, Jr., Michigan
 ○ Peppers started 12 games at DB, played a little offense, returned punts and kickoffs in 2015 and now moves to LB.
 LB **Ben Boulware**, Sr., Clemson
 LB **Raekwon McMillan**, Jr., Ohio State
 ○ McMillan led OSU with 119 tackles in 2015. This season he'll be the unquestioned leader of the defense.
 LB **Reuben Foster**, Sr., Alabama
 ○ The Alabama player with the Auburn tattoo was second in tackles for the Tide last season with 73.
 CB **Desmond King**, Sr., Iowa
 CB **Jourdan Lewis**, Sr., Michigan
 S **Derwin James**, So., Florida State
 S **Jamal Adams**, Jr., LSU
 ○ At 6-1, 211, and with 60 tackles and 4 INTs in 2015, Adams is bigger, and maybe better, than Tyrann Mathieu.

SPECIAL TEAMS

- K **Andy Phillips**, Sr., Utah
 ○ The former U.S. ski team Alpine racer has made 84 percent of his field goals, including a perfect 4-for-4 on kicks of 50 yards or longer.
 P **Hayden Hunt**, Sr., Colorado State
 KR **Adoree' Jackson**, Jr., USC
 ○ The Trojans' do-it-all star was excused from spring practice to focus on trying to qualify for the 2016 Olympics as a long jumper.
 AP **Christian McCaffrey**, Jr., Stanford

UNIT RANKINGS

Trench warfare: Welsh, Boettger and Myers lead Iowa's O-line.



When we asked ESPN experts to rank the nation's position groups, it came as no surprise that Alabama grabbed three mentions. But Iowa took home the best Big Ugly unit, and that front line might be the unsung piece that pushes the Hawkeyes to the next level in '16.

BROCK HUARD

SKILL PLAYERS

- 1 CLEMSON**
Deshaun Watson QB
Wayne Gallman RB
Artavis Scott WR
- 2 OKLAHOMA**
Baker Mayfield QB
Samaje Perine RB
Dede Westbrook WR
- 3 HOUSTON**
Greg Ward Jr. QB
Duke Catalan RB
Steven Dunbar WR
- 4 OLE MISS**
Chad Kelly QB
Jordan Wilkins RB
Evan Engram TE
- 5 WASHINGTON STATE**
Luke Falk QB
Gerard Wicks RB
Gabe Marks WR

The explosive arm of Kelly (87.0 QBR) will light up the Grove, and Damore'ea Stringfellow helps replace Laquon Treadwell at receiver. The Rebels put up north of 40 points per game, eighth in the FBS.

ED CUNNINGHAM

OFFENSIVE LINE

- 1 IOWA**
Boone Myers LG
Ike Boettger RT
Sean Welsh C/RG
- 2 ALABAMA**
Cam Robinson LT
Ross Pierschbacher C
Alphonse Taylor RG
- 3 FLORIDA STATE**
Rod Johnson LT
Alec Eberle C
Wilson Bell RG
- 4 CLEMSON**
Mitch Hyatt LT
Jay Guillermo C
Tyrone Crowder RG
- 5 BOISE STATE**
Steven Baggett RG
Travis Averill LG
Mario Yakoo RT

Iowa will miss center Austin Blythe, but Myers, Boettger, Welsh and Cole Croston have combined for 51 career starts and weigh in at an average of 302 pounds, helping keep QB C.J. Beathard upright.

BOOGIE McFARLAND

FRONT SEVEN

- 1 FLORIDA**
Caleb Brantley DT
Cece Jefferson DE
Jarrad Davis LB
- 2 LSU**
Davon Godchaux DT
Arden Key LB/DE
Kendell Beckwith LB
- 3 ALABAMA**
Jonathan Allen DE
Reuben Foster LB
Tim Williams LB
- 4 OHIO STATE**
Sam Hubbard DE
Raekwon McMillan LB
Tracy Sprinkle DT
- 5 MICHIGAN STATE**
Malik McDowell DT
Ed Davis LB
Riley Bullough LB

The Tigers switch to a 3-4 defense, allowing Key to stand up and rush off the edge at outside linebacker, and Godchaux will create havoc inside. Expect the sack total [34] to jump in a heavier attack scheme.

ROD GILMORE

DEFENSIVE BACKS

- 1 MICHIGAN**
Jabrill Peppers S/LB
Jourdan Lewis CB
Jeremy Clark CB
- 2 GEORGIA**
Aaron Davis CB
Malkom Parrish CB
Dominick Sanders S
- 3 BOSTON COLLEGE**
Isaac Viadom CB
John Johnson S
William Harris S
- 4 WASHINGTON**
Budda Baker S
Sidney Jones CB
Kevin King CB
- 5 OKLAHOMA**
Jordan Thomas CB
Steven Parker S
Ahmad Thomas S

Edging LSU for the final spot, OU faced a heavy workload (437 attempts), made 20 picks and kept opponents to just 6.0 yards per attempt [13th in the FBS]. Three starters return in the secondary.

DESMOND HOWARD

SPECIAL TEAMS

- 1 TENNESSEE**
Evan Berry KR
Cameron Sutton PR
Aaron Medley K
- 2 UTAH**
Andy Phillips K
Cory Butler-Byrd KR
Boobie Hobbs PR
- 3 TEXAS A&M**
Christian Kirk RS
Daniel LaCamera K
Shane Tripucka P
- 4 ALABAMA**
Damien Harris KR
Adam Griffith K
JK Scott P
- 5 STANFORD**
Christian McCaffrey RS
Conrad Ukropina K
Alex Robinson P

Utah's crew comes in ranked fourth in efficiency. "Automatic" Andy has hit 84 percent on field goals [4-for-4 from 50-plus] over three years, and Butler-Byrd has wheels [27.9 yards per return].

RUNNING BACKS ARE BACK

Christian McCaffrey and a wave of rushers are crashing college football's quarterback party.

BY RYAN McGEE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAYMON GARDNER





Carried away

A class of super sophomore rushers ran wild in 2015, with Leonard Fournette (LSU), Dalvin Cook (Florida State), Christian McCaffrey (Stanford) and Royce Freeman (Oregon) shouldering more than their share.

Percent of team's 2015 offense

Leonard Fournette	37%*
Christian McCaffrey	34%
Dalvin Cook	31%
Royce Freeman	26%

Percent of team's total TDs

Leonard Fournette	45%*
Dalvin Cook	38%
Royce Freeman	27%
Christian McCaffrey	25%

*Highest among Power 5 running backs

RUNNING BACKS ARE BACK

Two elderly men sit on a bench outside Stanford's practice field, staring silently at a cardinal-colored nylon curtain covering a fence. After 20 minutes, one finally speaks over the shouting, clacking and blaring of Drake and Future's "Jumpman" coming from beyond the screen.

"Behind that wall is either a football practice or a monster truck show," he declares.

"Actually," his pal replies, "it's probably both."

Barely hidden by the curtain, the Cardinal are busy grinding toward the 2016 season, toward defending their Pac-12 title and competing for a playoff bid, towed there by running back Christian McCaffrey, the Heisman Trophy runner-up and new NCAA record holder for all-purpose yardage in a season (3,864).

Unlike with most Power 5 programs, McCaffrey and Stanford work in public, on practice fields as out in the open as Hoover Tower or the Oval. The team stretches and drills where every meandering professor or cycling student can see. Even when the Cardinal move behind the security fence for high-level tinkering, it's not hard to find a knothole gap for a sneak peek of the football laboratory.

"I'm not sure what they think they're hiding," says Old Guy No. 1.

"Yeah, I already got their playbook down," Old Guy No. 2 replies, raising his fists. "Running backs right ... running backs left ... throw it if we need to. Repeat."

He doesn't just have Stanford's playbook. He might very well have the game plan for December's playoff field. After a breakneck decade of spreading and slinging and trick-eration, the running back is back.

"It's a great time to be playing football," says McCaffrey, a junior who totaled 437 touches in 2015—rushing, receiving, returning and even throwing three passes (two for TDs). "There's a lot of creativity in

the game. I know we're Stanford and known for pounding the ball, but that definition isn't what it used to be. You have to do a lot of different things now, especially as a running back. It's fun."

AFTER MORE THAN a decade of riding shotgun, running backs are reclaiming their turf one carry at a time. Three of the teams projected to still be in the College Football Playoff title hunt in six months are powered by elite runners: Oklahoma (Samaje Perine), Florida State (Dalvin Cook) and LSU (Leonard Fournette.) They head a growing list of runners expected to dominate the invitation list to December's Heisman ceremony as well as the front end of next year's NFL draft.

This is on the heels of McCaffrey's losing the 2015 award to Alabama's Derrick Henry, just the third runner this century to win the bronzed prize. Last year was the first time backs finished 1-2 in Heisman voting since 2009 and only the second time since 1994. What's more, five of the top eight finalists were runners. This season three return—McCaffrey, Cook and Fournette—and they'll be challenged by other elite backs, from OU's Perine and Oregon's Royce Freeman to UNC's Elijah Hood and Georgia's duo of Nick Chubb and Sony Michel.

Even programs that have pushed the passing envelope for a decade must now admit that there's a ceiling up there in the air. You want proof? Go check out the number of pass-heavy teams engraved on the BCS or College Football Playoff trophies. We'll wait. The road to No. 1 always travels right down the middle, with the trophy tucked firmly in the elbow of a tailback.

"When I was with the Raiders, my boss Jon Gruden would say the same thing all the time," explains Stanford head coach David Shaw, who learned the game at the feet of everyone from Dennis Green and Bill Walsh as a player to Gruden, Brian Billick and Jim Harbaugh as an assistant. "What you want to do on offense is present the illusion of sophistication but all in all remain very basic. You throw stuff at the defense, different formations, but then run a regular play that we just want to execute the right way. What does it take to execute the right way? That answer has always been the same. A smart quarterback and a great running back."

Shaw pauses, perhaps reflecting on the fact that he still hasn't chosen a QB to replace the beloved Kevin Hogan. "And if your quarterback still needs time to figure just how smart he can be, your best friend will always be a runner who can take care

Heisman helpfuls

Dalvin Cook, Leonard Fournette, Christian McCaffrey and Royce Freeman couldn't run to glory, or anywhere, without these guys.



LT Roderick Johnson
FLORIDA STATE

He won the Jacobs Blocking Trophy as the ACC's top OL.



C Ethan Pocic
LSU

His 128.5 knockdowns is the most by an LSU lineman since 2010.



RT Casey Tucker
STANFORD

McCaffrey gained 5-plus yards on 49.4 percent of runs off RT.



RT Tyrell Crosby*
OREGON

Freeman's 7.5 ypc on outside runs off RT topped all Power 5 RBs.**

*Moves to left tackle in 2016
**Minimum 40 carries

FROM LEFT: FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY; STEVE FRANZ/LSU ATHLETICS; CASEY VALENTINE/ISI PHOTOS; UNIVERSITY OF OREGON OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



Stanford doesn't exactly hide its intent to run you into the ground with a heavy dose of McCaffrey.

of things while you sort it out."

That's what Ezekiel Elliott was asked to do while Urban Meyer sifted through injured QBs in 2014—and he ran Ohio State all the way to a national championship. That's what Henry was asked to do as Nick Saban and offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin ramped Jake Coker up to speed, an approach that's become the business model at Bama (see: Mark Ingram/Greg McElroy '09 and Trent Richardson/AJ McCarron '11) and has resulted in four national titles.

So that's what will also be asked of McCaffrey and other backs during a fall that features a remarkable number of contenders saddled with big questions at quarterback. As stressful as that might be for college coaches in the short term, it already has NFL types wiping away drool thinking about drafts of the future.

Teams have praised Elliott, who was taken with the fourth pick of the draft. Elliott followed in the footsteps of Georgia's Todd Gurley,

whom the Rams took 10th overall last year, the first back taken in the first round since 2012. He responded by bringing the Rams just their second NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year Award since they drafted Jerome Bettis out of Notre Dame the year before Gurley was born.

"I think running backs are coming out of college with an expanded knowledge of the game that they simply didn't have before," explains Saban, who coached two of the seven first-round backs selected since 2011. "Even at places like Alabama or Stanford where we might be labeled as 'traditional' or 'pro style,' whatever you want to call it, we are always probing. We are always adding wrinkles. So as a result we are asking running backs to do more and process more and be more multidimensional all of the time. They are becoming like second quarterbacks on the field.

"But," he adds rather sharply, "it has to be the right kid to handle all

of that. I can ask anybody to do this stuff. That doesn't mean they can."

BACK ON THE FARM, Shaw and McCaffrey emerge from behind the practice field fence. The two old men are long gone. The player politely takes selfies with a waiting family, while the coach stops to chat with a couple of reporters.

He's immediately hit with a "2016: Comeback of the Running Back" question. With Drake and Future turned down, he accidentally (maybe) assumes the old-school role of LL Cool J.

"I always like to see what kind of a label people come up with for a season," Shaw says. "Yeah, other places might plan to use backs more, but when they hit October and times get tough, they'll go back to doing what they do. And we'll still do what we do. I wouldn't call it a comeback. Not here at Stanford. That's how we've been here for years." ■

WAY-
TOO-
EARLY

The Football Power Index likes LSU, but Nick Saban gets the benefit of my doubt. The Tide are ready to roll again.

BY MARK SCHLABACH

1 ALABAMA

Yes, the Crimson Tide will have to break in another new quarterback, and yes, they'll miss Heisman winner Derrick Henry. But Nick Saban continues to churn out wins (and NFL players), and this coming season won't be an exception.

2 CLEMSON

With quarterback Deshaun Watson returning, the Tigers have a shot to repeat as ACC champs. But Clemson will have to replace a lot of muscle from its stingy defense, including pass-rushing specialists Kevin Dodd (12 sacks) and Shaq Lawson (12½).

3 MICHIGAN

In only one season, coach Jim Harbaugh has transformed his alma mater into a CFP contender. Michigan doubled its victory total in Harbaugh's first year, and now he has his sights set on eclipsing Michigan State and Ohio State in the Big Ten.

4 FLORIDA STATE

Jimbo Fisher will have an interesting QB battle on his hands, but everybody else is back on offense, including Dalvin Cook. If FSU defeats Clemson on Oct. 29, it will have the inside track on a fourth ACC title in five seasons.

5 OKLAHOMA

The Sooners' trip to the playoff came a year early probably thanks to the additions of OC Lincoln Riley and transfer QB Baker Mayfield. If Oklahoma reloads at linebacker and receiver—typically not a problem for Bob Stoops—it could return.

6 LSU

If the Tigers can find some help for star tailback Leonard Fournette, they might be talented enough to unseat Alabama in the rugged SEC West. But without a better passing game, LSU will be a long shot to roll the toughest schedule in the nation.

7 BAYLOR

The Bears led the FBS in scoring (48.1 ppg) despite playing much of last season without their top two QBs. Seth Russell (neck) and Jarrett Stidham (ankle) return from injuries, but Baylor will have to replace all but one starter on both lines.



BRAD EDWARDS' PLAYOFF FORECAST

1 OKLAHOMA

FIESTA BOWL
GLENDALE, ARIZ.
12.31.2016

2 LSU

CHICK-FIL-A PEACH BOWL
ATLANTA
12.31.2016

4 WASHINGTON

3 CLEMSON

CFP NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
CLEMSON OVER OKLAHOMA
TAMPA, FLA.
01.09.2017

This season lacks a clear playoff favorite, so I'm going with QB experience. Oklahoma seems an easy pick to win the Big 12 again, while fellow 2015 semifinalist Clemson has a friendly slate aside from a trip to Tallahassee. I'll roll the dice on LSU—it gets Bama and Ole Miss at home. And in the wide-open West, emerging Washington could surprise. This time, Clemson takes home the trophy.

GOODYEAR COTTON BOWL CLASSIC

HOUSTON VS. NOTRE DAME
ARLINGTON, TEXAS
01.02.2017

CAPITAL ONE ORANGE BOWL

FLORIDA STATE VS. ALABAMA
MIAMI
12.30.2016

ROSE BOWL GAME PRESENTED BY NORTHWESTERN MUTUAL

MICHIGAN VS. USC
PASADENA, CALIF.
01.02.2017

ALLSTATE SUGAR BOWL

TENNESSEE VS. TCU
NEW ORLEANS
01.02.2017

8 STANFORD

Christian McCaffrey will have us watching #Pac12AfterDark this season, but the Cardinal have to replace Kevin Hogan's school-record 36 victories at QB. A brutal road schedule includes games at UCLA, Washington, Notre Dame and Oregon.

9 NOTRE DAME

The Fighting Irish fought through an injury-plagued season, which might pay dividends this fall. Which QB will Brian Kelly choose, Malik Zaire or DeShone Kizer? And will he hand off to Tarean Folston or Josh Adams?

10 OHIO STATE

Urban Meyer is calling this the "Year of Development." Catchy, right? The Buckeyes better develop quickly after nine underclassmen left early for the NFL, including four first-rounders: DE Joey Bosa, RB Ezekiel Elliott, CB Eli Apple and LB Darron Lee.

11 TENNESSEE

12 USC

13 GEORGIA

14 OLE MISS

15 OKLAHOMA STATE

16 MICHIGAN STATE

17 WASHINGTON

18 HOUSTON

19 NORTH CAROLINA

20 OREGON

21 TEXAS A&M

22 UCLA

23 IOWA

24 MIAMI

25 LOUISVILLE

F1CC

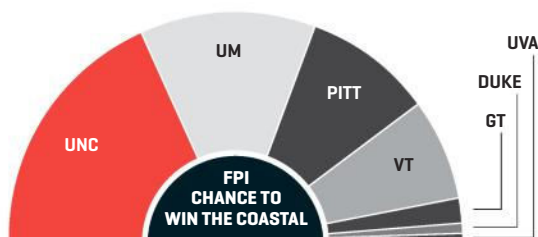
ACC outlook

ATLANTIC	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
FLORIDA STATE	2	51.6%
CLEMSON	4	37.9%
LOUISVILLE	12	10.2%
NC STATE	42	0.2%
BOSTON COLLEGE	51	0.1%
WAKE FOREST	58	0.0%
SYRACUSE	61	0.0%



*The Football Power Index is a predictive measure of team strength that represents how many points a team is above or below average. Division and conference projections are based on 10,000 simulations of each team's schedule, using FPI.

COASTAL	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
NORTH CAROLINA	20	36.5%
MIAMI (FLA.)	26	24.8%
PITTSBURGH	30	18.6%
VIRGINIA TECH	40	14.1%
GEORGIA TECH	46	3.3%
DUKE	56	1.7%
VIRGINIA	64	1.1%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
36.6

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
44%
FLORIDA STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **Deshaun Watson** Jr. Clemson

ALL-ACC

QB **Deshaun Watson** Jr. Clemson
RB **Dalvin Cook** Jr. Florida State
RB **Elijah Hood** Jr. North Carolina
WR **Isaiah Ford** Jr. Virginia Tech
WR **Mike Williams** Sr. Clemson
TE **Jordan Leggett** Sr. Clemson
OL **Jay Guillermo** Sr. Clemson
OL **Roderick Johnson** Jr. Florida State
OL **Mitch Hyatt** So. Clemson
OL **Dorian Johnson** Sr. Pittsburgh
OL **Caleb Peterson** Sr. North Carolina

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

S **Derwin James** So. Florida State

ALL-ACC

DE **DeMarcus Walker** Sr. Florida State
DE **Ejuan Price** Sr. Pittsburgh
DL **Christian Wilkins** So. Clemson
DT **DeAngelo Brown** Sr. Louisville
LB **Ben Boulware** Sr. Clemson
LB **Devonte Fields** Sr. Louisville
LB **Matt Milano** Sr. Boston College
CB **Marquez White** Sr. Florida State
CB **Cordrea Tankersley** Sr. Clemson
S **Derwin James** So. Florida State
S **Quin Blanding** Jr. Virginia

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Nick Weiler** Sr. North Carolina
P **Nicholas Conte** Sr. Virginia
RS **DeVon Edwards** Sr. Duke

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

9/3 Clemson @ Auburn [91*]
9/5 Florida State vs. Ole Miss [96]
9/17 Florida State @ Louisville [96]

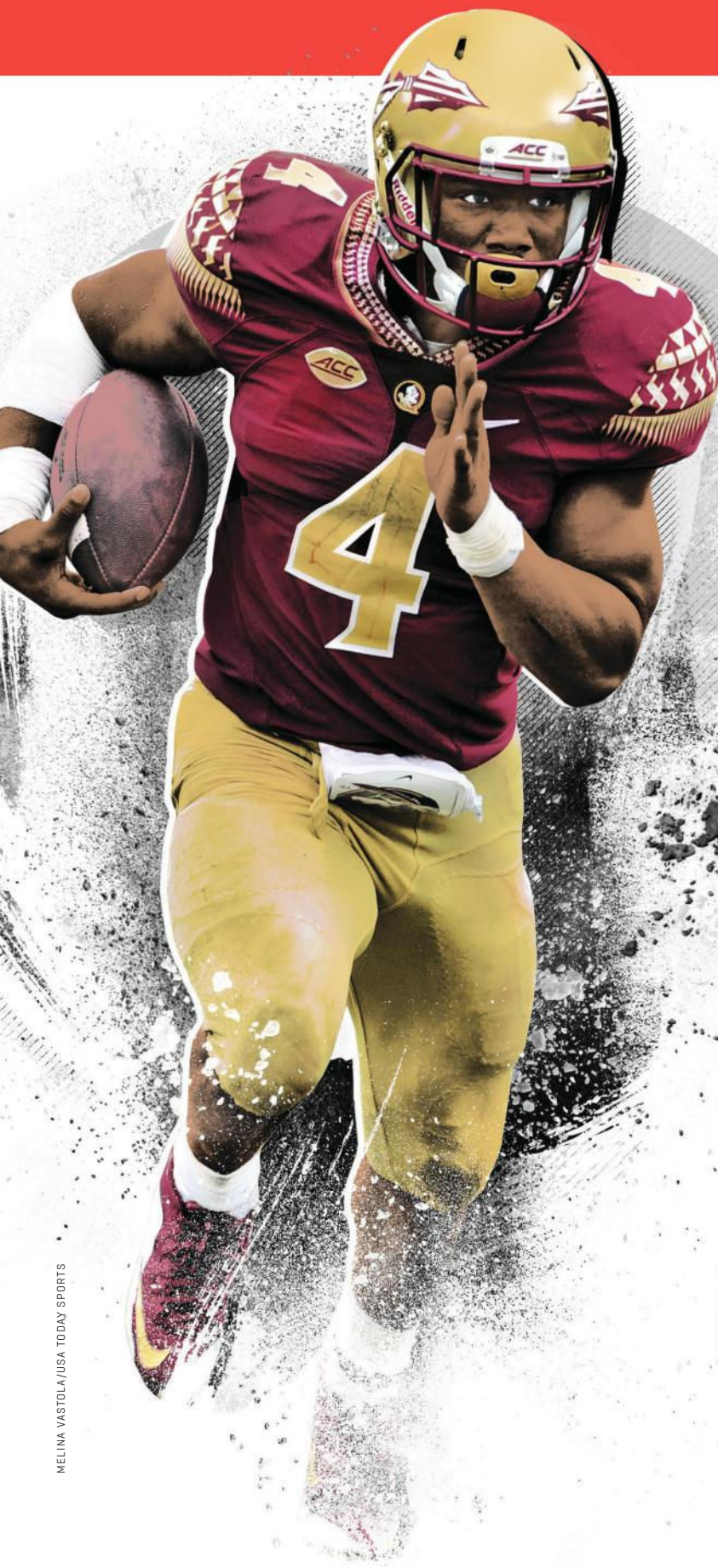
OCTOBER

10/1 Louisville @ Clemson [89]
10/8 Florida State @ Miami [Fla.] [90]
10/29 Clemson @ Florida State [98]

NOVEMBER

11/5 Florida State @ NC State [84]
11/12 Pittsburgh @ Clemson [83]
11/26 Florida @ Florida State [86]

*Matchup quality [0-100 scale] rates games based on team strength [FPI] and how close the contest is expected to be.



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

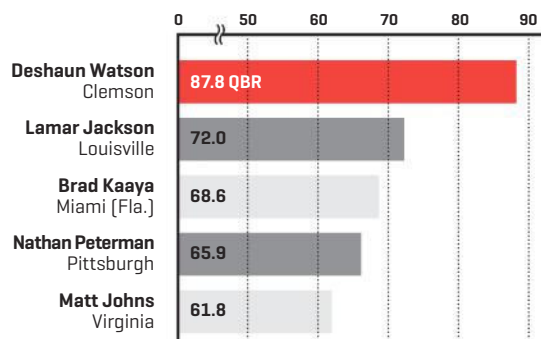
Even with two top-five FPI heavyweights, the ACC ranks third in average SOS.

33

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

It's Deshaun Watson and ... everyone else. The Clemson QB's 87.8 QBR was No. 2 in the FBS in 2015 and tops all returners.



Dalvin Cook

Forget Fournette—Cook is the game's most explosive back. Ask the defenses the FSU junior burned for 22 runs of 20-plus yards, the most in the Power 5.

1 Florida State

COACH Jimbo Fisher (7th season)
68-14 (4-2 in bowl games)

The Seminoles should be in the College Football Playoff mix again, with 11 starters back on offense, including, most critically, dynamic rusher Dalvin Cook, who broke the program's single-season rushing record last year. If Florida State can find some consistency at quarterback and build depth at linebacker, another ACC title could be in its grasp. —Andrea Adelson

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (6-2)
BOWL GAME Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl vs. Houston, 38-24 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Everett Golson: 1,778 yards
RUSHING **Dalvin Cook: 1,691 yards**
RECEIVING Travis Rudolph: 916 yards
TACKLES Reggie Northrup: 94
SACKS DeMarcus Walker: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS Lamaricus Brutus: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Dalvin Cook

Cook's accomplishments in his sophomore season make for quite a list: No. 6 in the nation with 1,691 rush yards; No. 8 with 19 rush TDs; tops in the Power 5 with 7.38 yards per carry (minimum 100 rushes); a unanimous All-ACC pick by the media. In all, Cook was the only player to rank top 10 in the nation in yards per carry, rush yards per game, all-purpose yards, total rush yards, rush touchdowns and scoring. Even more amazing? FSU coach Jimbo Fisher says Cook looks better this offseason than he ever has.

● X-FACTOR LB Matthew Thomas

Way back in 2013, Thomas was the No. 6 player in the ESPN 300 and considered one to watch at Florida State. Now, after limited contributions in his first three seasons because of injuries and suspensions (NCAA rules violations), Thomas might finally make a major impact. He needs to, considering the Noles' major needs at linebacker, where they are down two key contributors and face depth concerns for a second straight year.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Sean Maguire, who replaced an ineffective Everett Golson last year, missed the spring with an ankle injury and isn't assured the No. 1 spot this fall. The majority of spring reps went to J.J. Cosentino (like Maguire a prototypical dropback passer) and dual-threat candidates Deondre Francois and Malik Henry. Redshirt freshman Francois, who spent last season learning the system, is the favorite to win the starting job.

THE PRESSER

● For the first time since 2012, FSU didn't have a 1,000-yard receiver, and its 7.94 ypa was its lowest since 2010. Those poor showings were due in part to the squad's struggles at QB, not to mention the loss of some of the nation's best receivers to the NFL. This year's corps is not much more imposing.

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEED TO IMPROVE THE PASSING GAME? "They're so big up front and can mash you, but I wonder if they will cut it loose. How good can they be? That style of offense allows you to stay in the game if you can bring down the run game." —ACC defensive coach

● Cook was one of the best running backs in the country a year ago and will go into the season generating plenty of Heisman hype.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING DOWN A COOK-LED ATTACK? "You have to disguise what you're doing so they can't get a bead on you, but you've got to mix coverages, your fronts and your pressures. With everything you do, you have to make sure you're outnumbering the box." —ACC head coach

● The Florida State defensive line was much improved in 2015, with DeMarcus Walker (10½ sacks) leading the way. He returns, along with two other starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVING DEFENSE?** "They are getting back to the kind of defensive line that Florida State has traditionally had every year. They're a little more athletic than they've been the last few years, especially at defensive end, and they have more experience returning." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Deondre Francois	RFr.	6-1 214 ●
RB	Dalvin Cook	Jr.	5-11 206 ●
WR	Kermit Whitfield	Sr.	5-8 180 ●
WR	Travis Rudolph	Jr.	6-1 189 ●
WR	George Campbell	So.	6-4 192 ●
TE	Ryan Izzo	So.	6-5 243 ●
C	Alec Eberle	So.	6-4 287 ●
RG	Wilson Bell	Jr.	6-5 313 ●
LG	Kareem Are	Sr.	6-6 334 ●
RT	Brock Ruble	So.	6-8 293 ●
LT	Roderick Johnson	Jr.	6-7 307 ●
K	Ricky Aguayo	Fr.	6-1 198
DEFENSE			
DE	DeMarcus Walker	Sr.	6-3 281 ●
NG	Derrick Nnadi	Jr.	6-1 303 ●
DT	Demarcus Christmas	So.	6-4 290
DE	Josh Sweat	So.	6-5 236 ●
LB	Jacob Pugh	Jr.	6-4 232
LB	Ro'Derrick Hoskins	Jr.	6-2 245 ●
LB	Trey Marshall	Jr.	6-0 209
CB	Tarvarus McFadden	So.	6-2 201
CB	Marquez White	Sr.	6-0 181 ●
SS	Derwin James	So.	6-3 213 ●
FS	Nate Andrews	Sr.	6-0 210
P	Logan Tyler	Fr.	6-0 195

4

Walker forced four fumbles last year, tied for most in the conference.



SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.6 ● FPI CHANCE FLORIDA STATE WINS

9/5 vs. Ole Miss (Orlando) 71% ● 9/10 vs. Charleston Southern 99% ● 9/17 @ Louisville 69%
9/24 @ South Florida 89% ● 10/1 vs. North Carolina 86% ● 10/8 @ Miami (Fla.) 79%
10/15 vs. Wake Forest 96% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Clemson 64% ● 11/5 @ NC State 88%
11/11 vs. Boston College 96% ● 11/19 @ Syracuse 93% ● 11/26 vs. Florida 86%

2 Clemson

COACH Dabo Swinney (9th season)
75-27 (5-4 in bowl games)

Preseason expectations are at an all-time high for the Tigers after their narrow loss in the national title game. Heisman finalist Deshaun Watson returns along with seven other starters on offense, but whether the Tigers repeat as Atlantic champs or make it back to the College Football Playoff depends on the defense, which must replace seven starters. —A.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Deshaun Watson

The 2015 Heisman finalist can do it all: He amassed 5,209 yards of total offense (becoming the first player in FBS history with 4,000 yards passing and 1,000 yards rushing in a season) just a year after an ACL injury. Late in the season, he showed how effective he can be in the run game, finishing with three 100-yard rushing performances in his final four games. He also had a hand in 478 of Clemson's 550 yards in the national championship game, carrying the then-undefeated Tigers to within points of a title.

● X-FACTOR DE Austin Bryant

The sophomore is penciled in to take over at one of the vacant defensive end spots, which has recently featured standouts Vic Beasley, Shaq Lawson and Kevin Dodd. Bryant (6-4, 265 pounds) is similar in size to Lawson and Dodd, who combined for 49 TFLs a season ago (ranking No. 3 and No. 5 in the nation). Given the production at this position over the past three seasons, Bryant's improvement from 2015—23 tackles, 2½ for loss, in 13 games—will be crucial for this defense to remain a top-10 unit.

● POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

B.J. Goodson, a senior who led the team with 108 tackles last season, is gone, leaving a huge hole in the heart of the defense. Sophomore Kendall Joseph [six career tackles] leads the competition to replace him, with early-enrollee freshmen Shaq Smith and Tre Lamar, both ESPN 300 recruits, also in the mix.

THE PRESSER

● The Tigers led the ACC with 514.5 yards per game last year, and Clemson returns its ACC POY QB, its leading rusher and wide receiver, and its most talented receiver, Mike Williams, who missed most of 2015 with a neck injury. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING DOWN THIS OFFENSE?** "They're the most talented team in the ACC, so we've got to be smarter than they are, and we've got to outscheme them. And you've got to win the special-teams game—because you hope they're such prima donnas that they don't want to do special teams." —ACC head coach

● Defensive coordinator Brent Venables replaced seven starters last season, and Clemson still ranked No. 10 in total D. This season Venables has yet another seven starters—six of whom had eligibility remaining—to replace. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF REPLACING SO MANY STARTERS SO QUICKLY?** "When guys leave early, that makes it a little tougher. It's the second year in a row, so now you're down to your third group. Let's see how they do, because I think it will be tougher for them." —ACC defensive coach

● Venables' aggressive scheme delivered a nation-best 126 TFLs and 48 sacks, second in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO COUNTERATTACK THAT SCHEME?** "Run draws and quick three-step drops so you don't have to worry about pressure. RTP: refuse to participate. If they're blitzing up the A-gaps, then I'm not running there. I'm running power read and option, running stretch to take advantage." —ACC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 14-1 (8-0)

BOWL GAME CFP National Championship Game Presented by AT&T vs. Alabama, 45-40 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Deshaun Watson: 4,104 yards

RUSHING Wayne Gallman: 1,527 yards

RECEIVING Artavis Scott: 901 yards

TACKLES B.J. Goodson: 108

SACKS Shaq Lawson: 12½

INTERCEPTIONS Cordrea Tankersley: 5

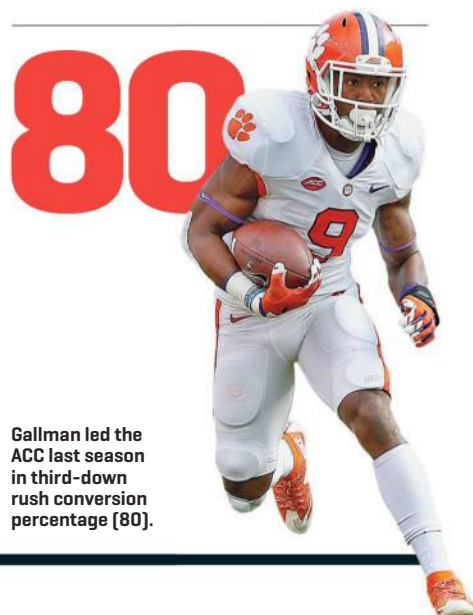
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Deshaun Watson	Jr. 6-2 210 ●
RB	Wayne Gallman	Jr. 6-1 215 ●
WR	Hunter Renfrow	So. 5-10 175 ●
WR	Artavis Scott	Jr. 5-11 190 ●
WR	Mike Williams	Sr. 6-4 220 ●
TE	Jordan Leggett	Sr. 6-5 255 ●
C	Jay Guillermo	Sr. 6-3 310 ●
RG	Tyrone Crowder	Jr. 6-2 325 ●
LG	Taylor Hearn	So. 6-5 324 ●
RT	Jake Fruhmorgen	So. 6-6 292 ●
LT	Mitch Hyatt	So. 6-5 295 ●
K	Greg Huegel	So. 5-11 185 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Austin Bryant	So. 6-4 265 ●
DT	Dexter Lawrence	Fr. 6-5 340 ●
DT	Carlos Watkins	Sr. 6-3 300 ●
DE	Christian Wilkins	So. 6-4 315 ●
LB	Ben Boulware	Sr. 5-11 240 ●
LB	Kendall Joseph	So. 6-0 230 ●
NB	Dorian O'Daniel	Jr. 6-1 215 ●
CB	Cordrea Tankersley	Sr. 6-1 195 ●
CB	Mark Fields	So. 5-10 195 ●
SS	Jadar Johnson	Sr. 6-1 205 ●
FS	Van Smith	So. 6-0 190 ●
P	Andy Teasdale	Sr. 5-11 190 ●



Gallman led the ACC last season in third-down rush conversion percentage (80).

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.5 ● FPI CHANCE CLEMSON WINS

9/3 @ Auburn **73%** ● **9/10** vs. Troy **99%** ● **9/17** vs. South Carolina State **99%**
9/22 @ Georgia Tech **88%** ● **10/1** vs. Louisville **79%** ● **10/7** @ Boston College **88%**
10/15 vs. NC State **92%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** @ Florida State **37%** ● **11/5** vs. Syracuse **95%**
11/12 vs. Pittsburgh **87%** ● **11/19** @ Wake Forest **91%** ● **11/26** vs. South Carolina **91%**

3 Louisville

COACH Bobby Petrino [3rd season]
17-9 [1-1 in bowl games]

After an abysmal 2-4 start, the Cards won six of their final seven games, including a Music City Bowl win over Texas A&M. That late-season success should carry over this fall, as Louisville returns 17 starters, tied for the most in the AAC. But in an Atlantic Division stacked with the likes of Clemson and Florida State, a 10-win season might be good enough for only third place. —A.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Lamar Jackson

His bowl performance against Texas A&M—he threw for 227 yards and ran for 226 more in the 27-21 win—sent expectations for 2016 soaring. Before that game, Jackson threw for 12 TDs and averaged more than 150 passing yards as he split time [and starts] with then-sophomore Kyle Bolin. Now entering his sophomore year, Jackson appears entrenched as the starter—and that gives Louisville stability at quarterback heading into a season for the first time since Bobby Petrino returned as coach.

● X-FACTOR WR Jamari Staples

In his first season at Louisville after transferring from UAB [where he had five touchdowns and almost 650 yards in his freshman and sophomore seasons], Staples led the Cardinals with 638 yards and 17.2 yards per catch—fourth in the ACC—despite missing the first four games with a knee injury. But he flashed the potential to give Petrino his first 1,000-yard receiver since Jarvis Wright at Arkansas in 2011.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

Senior Sheldon Rankins is off to the NFL, and he leaves the biggest hole to fill on the Louisville defense. He started all 26 games the past two seasons, and there's not much game experience behind him. Senior Drew Bailey and junior Johnny Richardson, the only returners with experience, have just 22 combined career tackles. Redshirt freshman G.G. Robinson, junior college transfer Chris Williams and early-enrollee freshman Kordell Slater will all compete for the starting spot.

THE PRESSER

● Jackson ran for 960 yards last season, the fifth-best total for an FBS QB (and sixth best among all ACC players). He logged five 100-yard games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING JACKSON DOWN?** "We did a very good job of keeping him in the pocket. Given a year now, they're going to prepare all spring and all camp with him as the starter. He'll become much more effective in their base offense." —ACC head coach

● Jackson is a departure from the pro-style-type quarterbacks Petrino usually favors. And his passing needs work—Jackson ranked No. 71 in the nation in pass efficiency, and his 54.7 completion percentage was tied for 90th among FBS quarterbacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSE'S LIMITATIONS WITH JACKSON UNDER CENTER?** "A lot more spread quarterback-type runs than before. The passing game is pretty standardized. Maybe more short bubble passes and screens with a quarterback who isn't a great pocket guy." —ACC defensive coach

● Louisville got good news in the offseason when four key starters on defense decided to return to school, including LB Devonte Fields [team-leading 22 TFLs and 10½ sacks] and S Josh Harvey-Clemons [three interceptions]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RETURNING DEFENSE?** "Blocking them up front? Wow. They're big, physical and athletic. That was probably the most talented defensive front in the conference—they and Clemson. They've just got some freaky athletes." —ACC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 [5-3]

BOWL GAME Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl vs. Texas A&M, 27-21 W

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Lamar Jackson: 1,840 yards

RUSHING Lamar Jackson: 960 yards

RECEIVING Jamari Staples: 638 yards

TACKLES Keith Kelsey: 107

SACKS Devonte Fields: 10½

INTERCEPTIONS Trumaine Washington: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Lamar Jackson	So. 6-3 196 ●
RB	Brandon Radcliff	Sr. 5-9 214 ●
WR	James Quick	Sr. 6-1 191 ●
WR	Ja'Quay Savage	Jr. 6-3 214 ●
WR	Jamari Staples	Sr. 6-4 196 ●
TE	Cole Hikutini	Sr. 6-5 242 ●
C	Tobijah Hughley	Sr. 6-3 289 ●
RG	Kiola Mahoni	Jr. 6-3 300 ●
LG	Lukayus McNeil	So. 6-8 313 ●
RT	Kenny Thomas	So. 6-6 320 ●
LT	Geron Christian	So. 6-6 320 ●
K	Austin Johnson	Fr. 6-2 195 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Chris Williams	Jr. 6-1 295 ●
NT	DeAngelo Brown	Sr. 6-0 308 ●
DE	Drew Bailey	Sr. 6-3 284 ●
SLB	Devonte Fields	Sr. 6-4 245 ●
ILB	Keith Kelsey	Sr. 6-1 236 ●
MLB	Stacy Thomas	Jr. 6-1 225 ●
WLB	James Hearn	Jr. 6-3 257 ●
CB	Shaq Wiggins	Jr. 5-10 171 ●
CB	Trumaine Washington	Jr. 5-10 181 ●
SS	Josh Harvey-Clemons	Sr. 6-5 230 ●
FS	Chuck Williams	Jr. 6-2 204 ●
P	Austin Johnson	Fr. 6-2 195 ●

6¹/₂



Kelsey led all Louisville linebackers with 6½ disrupted dropbacks in 2015.

ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.0 ● **FPI CHANCE LOUISVILLE WINS**

9/1 vs. Charlotte **99%** ● 9/9 @ Syracuse **81%** ● 9/17 vs. Florida State **31%**
9/24 @ Marshall **86%** ● 10/1 @ Clemson **21%** ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/14 vs. Duke **90%**
10/22 vs. NC State **82%** ● 10/29 @ Virginia **82%** ● 11/5 @ Boston College **74%**
11/12 vs. Wake Forest **89%** ● 11/17 @ Houston **72%** ● 11/26 vs. Kentucky **88%**

4 NC State

Dave Doeren goes into a crucial fourth season with a revamped offensive staff, a new starting quarterback—and plenty of questions after an underwhelming 2015 season. Add in a more challenging nonconference schedule (hello, Notre Dame and ECU; goodbye, Troy and South Alabama) and the Wolfpack will remain a step behind the Atlantic's elite. —A.A.

COACH Dave Doeren (4th season)
18-20 (1-1 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 (3-5)
BOWL GAME Belk Bowl
vs. Mississippi State, 51-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jacoby Brissett: 2,662 yards
RUSHING **Matthew Dayes: 865 yards**
RECEIVING **Jaylen Samuels: 597 yards**
TACKLES **Airius Moore: 77**
SACKS Mike Rose: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS Jerod Fernandez: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Matthew Dayes

The team's leading rusher a year ago, Dayes would have cleared 1,000 yards if he hadn't missed the final five games of the season with turf toe (an injury that also ended his musings about declaring for the NFL draft as a junior). He averaged a team-high 108.1 yards per game in 2015 and 6.5 yards per carry. NC State has depth in the backfield with the returns of hybrid TE Jaylen Samuels and RB Reggie Gallaspy II, but the strength of its run game centers on a healthy Dayes.

● X-FACTOR WR Nyheim Hines

Best known for his 100-yard kickoff return against Clemson, Hines needs to build off a freshman year that featured dynamic plays in the return game—he led the team with 1,419 all-purpose yards. But he was inconsistent on offense, as only 499 of his yards came from scrimmage. Hines, who ran track with the indoor team this winter, can play tailback and slot, and much more will be put on his shoulders in 2016.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Though some believe sophomore Jalan McClendon, who played in seven games last year, has the edge, redshirt freshman Jakobi Meyers presents more of a dual threat—in fact, he's the best running quarterback Doeren has had since he arrived. Even if McClendon becomes the starter, new offensive coordinator Eli Drinkwitz, a former assistant at Boise State who learned the spread from Gus Malzahn at Auburn, could design packages to utilize Meyers' running ability.

THE PRESSER

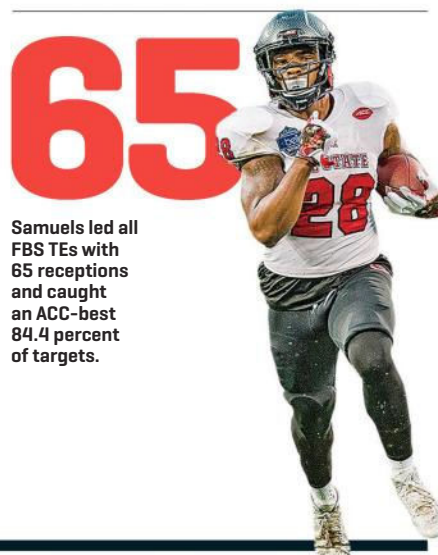
● NC State brings back eight starters on defense, and its strength will be in the interior, with 300-pounder B.J. Hill. The Wolfpack ranked 11th among Power 5 schools in nonsack rushes between the tackles last season, allowing 3.85 yards per carry. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO RUN ON THEM?** "If you're really good up front, you go nose to nose with them and you go right at them. If you don't feel you can handle that, then what kind of perimeter game do you have and can you fatigue those guys?" —ACC head coach

● McClendon will be under the microscope, replacing the steady Jacoby Brissett, who threw for 43 touchdowns and more than 5,000 yards in his two years in Raleigh. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MCCLENDON'S STRENGTHS?** "He can throw it through the car wash and it won't get wet, but he'll throw it to the other team too. If he was the answer, he'd have been in already. He can get out of the pocket but not like Brissett." —ACC defensive coach

● NC State hasn't had a 1,000-yard receiver since 2003. In fact, no receiver under Doeren has had more than 620 yards. Samuels' 597 yards was tops last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SKILL PLAYERS?** "They don't have guys outside who can stretch the field vertically and make you afraid of playing man-to-man, so that allows you to overload or play to their strength, which is their run game. You don't really see the speed of those guys like you do from Clemson or Florida State." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Jalan McClendon	So.	6-5 212
RB	Matthew Dayes	Sr.	5-9 203 ●
RB	Jaylen Samuels	Jr.	5-11 223 ●
WR	Bra'Lon Cherry	Sr.	5-11 191 ●
WR	Jumichael Ramos	Sr.	6-2 200 ●
TE	Cole Cook	Jr.	6-6 250
C	Joseph Scelfo	Sr.	5-11 300
RG	Tony Adams	Jr.	6-2 315 ●
LG	Bryce Kennedy	Sr.	6-3 305
RT	Tyler Jones	So.	6-3 300
LT	Will Richardson	So.	6-6 303 ●
K	Connor Haskins	Sr.	5-8 176 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Darian Roseboro	So.	6-4 285
DT	B.J. Hill	Jr.	6-4 300 ●
DT	Kentavious Street	Jr.	6-2 290 ●
DE	Bradley Chubb	Jr.	6-4 273 ●
LB	Airius Moore	Jr.	6-0 237 ●
LB	Jerod Fernandez	Jr.	6-0 220 ●
NB	Dravious Wright	Sr.	5-10 208 ●
CB	Mike Stevens	Jr.	5-11 190 ●
CB	Jack Tocho	Sr.	6-0 200
SS	Josh Jones	Jr.	6-2 215 ●
FS	Germaine Pratt	Jr.	6-3 234
P	A.J. Cole III	So.	6-4 230 ●



Samuels led all FBS TEs with 65 receptions and caught an ACC-best 84.4 percent of targets.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1 ● FPI CHANCE NC STATE WINS

9/1 vs. William & Mary 96% ● 9/10 @ East Carolina 80% ● 9/17 vs. Old Dominion 93%
9/24 BYE ● 10/1 vs. Wake Forest 74% ● 10/8 vs. Notre Dame 33% ● 10/15 @ Clemson 8%
10/22 @ Louisville 18% ● 10/29 vs. Boston College 67% ● 11/5 vs. Florida State 12%
11/12 @ Syracuse 58% ● 11/19 vs. Miami (Fla.) 44% ● 11/25 @ North Carolina 23%

5 Boston College

COACH Steve Addazio [4th season]
17-21 [0-2 in bowl games]

So much for defense winning championships. BC had the nation's No. 1 defense in 2015 ... but also the third-worst offense. The Eagles posted their first losing record under Steve Addazio, including going winless in the ACC. But that downturn should be short-lived: With a revamped coaching staff, the Eagles could make it back to a bowl if they can find stability at quarterback. —A.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DE Harold Landry

As a sophomore, Landry had 15½ TFLs last season off the edge, using his combination of speed and power—plus his 6-foot-3, 245-pound frame—to create matchup advantages. He was tied for fourth on the team with 4½ sacks in '15, and this year the goal is to reach double digits. Landry is one of an impressive seven starters returning on defense for Boston College, including three of its five leaders in tackles for loss.

● X-FACTOR LB Connor Strachan

Under former coordinator Don Brown, BC got heaps of production from its linebackers last season, thanks in large part to star senior Steven Daniels. Though Brown and Daniels are gone, expect more of the same under new DC Jim Reid, hired from Iowa. Strachan [75 tackles in '15, second best on the team] takes over in the middle and might be even more physical and athletic than Daniels, a second-team All-ACC linebacker last year.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

BC must get this one right to avoid another losing season. The numbers in 2015 were ugly: Four QBs had at least 40 attempts, but none had a better completion rate than 52 percent; they combined for just eight passing TDs and averaged only 5.36 yards per attempt; and they logged seven games with fewer than 100 passing yards. Patrick Towles, a graduate transfer from Kentucky, is expected to battle for the top spot with Darius Wade, who returns from a broken left ankle after starting the first three games of 2015.

THE PRESSER

● The Eagles' defense led the nation last year with just 254.3 yards allowed per game and ranked No. 5 in pass efficiency defense, giving up only nine passing touchdowns, tops in the ACC and fourth fewest in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THE DEFENSE WILL MAINTAIN THAT LEVEL OF PLAY?** "Their front seven are always big guys, very physical. They play together very well. They are more athletic in the secondary than they have been in the past." —ACC offensive coach

● Towles lost his starting job at Kentucky at the end of 2015, and after graduating in December and transferring to BC, he'll be eligible to play immediately. His 5,099 career passing yards and 22 career starts make him one of the most experienced players on the roster. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TOWLES' IMPACT ON THE TEAM?** "He's got some ability, but there's always a reason guys transfer after they got beat out. But I will say this: He's better than anyone [at BC] who's played against us." —ACC defensive coach

● Top returning receiver Thadd Smith had just 233 yards last year [57th in the ACC], and top returning RB Tyler Rouse tallied 426 yards [23rd], highlighting another problem for BC: few playmakers at the skill positions. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSIVE THREATS?** "They really don't scare you outside, so it allows you to focus on truly stopping the run. There's always a guy who can be the unblocked defender. They'll try to run plays to exploit that, but they don't have the people to execute it." —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [0-8]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING John Fadule: 464 yards
RUSHING Jeff Smith: 450 yards
RECEIVING Thadd Smith: 233 yards
TACKLES Steven Daniels: 82
SACKS Matt Milano: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Justin Simmons: 5

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

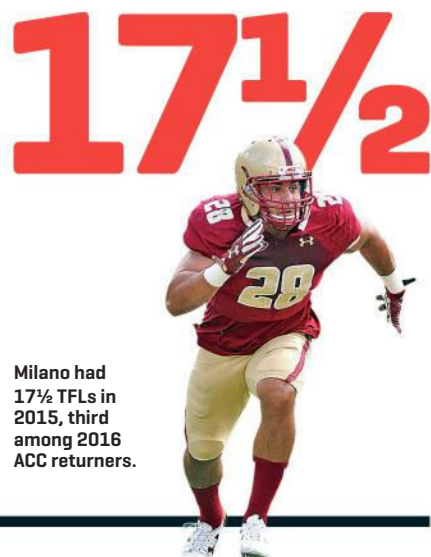
OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Patrick Towles	Sr.	6-5 238 ●
RB	Jon Hilliman	So.	6-0 224 ●
TE	Michael Giacone	Sr.	6-5 254
WR	Thadd Smith	Jr.	5-9 175 ●
WR	Charlie Callinan	Jr.	6-4 224 ●
TE	Tommy Sweeney	So.	6-5 246 ●
C	Jon Baker	Jr.	6-3 293 ●
RG	Chris Lindstrom	So.	6-4 260 ●
LG	Jim Cashman	Sr.	6-7 302
RT	Jimmy Lowery	Sr.	6-4 290
LT	Aaron Monteiro	So.	6-7 336 ●
K	Colton Lichtenberg	So.	5-10 175 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Kevin Kavalec	Sr.	6-2 253
DT	Truman Gutapfel	Sr.	6-3 281 ●
DT	Ray Smith	So.	6-1 264
DE	Harold Landry	Jr.	6-3 245 ●
SLB	Matt Milano	Sr.	6-1 218 ●
MLB	Connor Strachan	Jr.	6-2 230 ●
WLB	Ty Schwab	Jr.	6-1 222
CB	Isaac Yiadom	Jr.	6-1 184 ●
CB	Kamrin Moore	Jr.	5-11 192 ●
SS	William Harris	So.	6-2 193
FS	John Johnson	Sr.	6-0 198 ●
P	Satchel Ziffer	Sr.	6-4 206

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.3 ● FPI CHANCE BOSTON COLLEGE WINS

9/3 vs. Georgia Tech [Dublin, Ireland] 49% ● 9/10 @ Massachusetts [Foxborough] 92%
9/17 @ Virginia Tech 32% ● 9/24 vs. Wagner 99% ● 10/1 vs. Buffalo 92% ● 10/7 vs. Clemson 12%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Syracuse 70% ● 10/29 @ NC State 33% ● 11/5 vs. Louisville 26%
11/11 @ Florida State 5% ● 11/19 vs. Connecticut 74% ● 11/26 @ Wake Forest 47%



Milano had 17½ TFLs in 2015, third among 2016 ACC returners.

6 Wake Forest

COACH Dave Clawson [3rd season]
6-18 [0-0 in bowl games]

Head coach Dave Clawson has won a total of two ACC games in his first two seasons since joining Wake from Bowling Green, but he's aiming for a turnaround in Year 3 with a much more experienced team. With nine starters back on offense and a manageable nonconference schedule, the Deacs can dream big: They might even jump to five or six wins this season. —A.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB John Wolford

Wake Forest's offense was among the worst in the nation in 2015, ranking 119th in points [17.4] and 113th in yards per game [333.4]—though both were improvements from 2014. Wolford has never thrown more touchdowns than interceptions in a season, and his nine passing TDs last year ranked just 15th among ACC QBs. But now is the time for that to change, with sophomore Kendall Hinton pushing him for the starting job. Whoever is under center will be aided by receiver Cortez Lewis, who had 611 yards and four touchdowns as a redshirt freshman last year.

X-FACTOR DE Duke Ejiofor

Despite missing much of the preseason and the first five games due to a concussion last year, Ejiofor was the Deacons' leading pass rusher with 4½ sacks. The junior started to come into his own late in the season, making 16 more tackles in seven games in 2015 than he did in 10 games in 2014. Clawson believes Ejiofor has an opportunity to play at an All-ACC level in 2016.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

All-ACC player Brandon Chubb (last year's leading tackler with 107) and Hunter Williams are gone, leaving big holes to fill at the position. Senior returning starter Marquel Lee will be crucial to solidifying the unit: He had 71 tackles and led the team with 10 TFLs last season. Also look for junior Jaboree Williams, sophomore NB Demetrius Kemp and redshirt freshmen Nate Mays and Justin Strnad to contribute.

THE PRESSER

The offensive line remains an issue, as the Deacs ranked No. 122 with 105.2 rushing ypg. [Somehow, that's 65 yards per game better than in 2014.] **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE'S STRUGGLES?** "These guys get knocked back, and they can't create any space. They're undermanned, but they're also at a disadvantage in the style in which they're asked to block. You can't take a guy that's not as physically talented as the player that he's going against and make him go lateral. The guy's getting his butt kicked." —ACC defensive coach

Clawson's defense has been strong, ranking in the top 50 in points allowed [24.6], yards allowed [363.8] and pass defense [202.5]. This unit held Clemson, FSU and Notre Dame below their season scoring averages. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE DEFENSE?** "They're very smart, they know their schemes very well and the effort their guys play with allows them to really be in every game they play. They're not going to have a lot of missed assignments that are going to go for big plays." —ACC offensive coach

Wake Forest had 18 freshmen and sophomores make significant contributions in 2015, meaning this team can take advantage of both youth and experience in 2016. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WAKE'S IMPROVEMENTS DESPITE CONSECUTIVE 3-9 SEASONS?** "They're very sound and well-coached, but athletically they get outmatched. You'll see the freshmen and sophomores be much improved. Dramatically." —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [1-7]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING John Wolford: 1,791 yards

RUSHING Tyler Bell: 451 yards

RECEIVING Cortez Lewis: 611 yards

TACKLES Brandon Chubb: 107

SACKS Duke Ejiofor: 4½

INTERCEPTIONS Brad Watson: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	John Wolford	Jr. 6-1 205 ●
TB	Tyler Bell	So. 5-11 205 ●
WR	Tabari Hines	So. 5-10 165 ●
WR	Jared Crump	Sr. 6-3 205 ●
WR	Cortez Lewis	So. 6-1 200 ●
TE	Cam Serigne	Jr. 6-3 245 ●
C	Josh Harris	Sr. 6-4 310 ●
RG	Phil Haynes	So. 6-4 280 ●
LG	Tyler Hayworth	Sr. 6-4 325 ●
RT	Ryan Anderson	So. 6-6 290 ●
LT	Justin Herron	So. 6-5 310 ●
K	Mike Weaver	Jr. 6-1 195 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Duke Ejiofor	Jr. 6-4 275 ●
NT	Zeek Rodney	Jr. 6-1 295 ●
DT	Josh Banks	Sr. 6-4 275 ●
DE	Wendell Dunn	Jr. 6-3 250 ●
LB	Jaboree Williams	Jr. 6-0 240 ●
LB	Marquel Lee	Sr. 6-3 235 ●
NB	Demetrius Kemp	So. 6-1 205 ●
CB	Dionte Austin	So. 6-0 165 ●
CB	Brad Watson	Sr. 6-0 190 ●
SS	Ryan Janvion	Sr. 5-11 190 ●
FS	Cameron Glenn	So. 6-1 200 ●
P	Dom Maggio	Fr. 6-3 165 ●



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.8 ● **FPI CHANCE WAKE FOREST WINS**

9/1 vs. Tulane 88% ● 9/10 @ Duke 43% ● 9/17 vs. Delaware 98%
9/24 @ Indiana 41% ● 10/1 @ NC State 26% ● 10/8 vs. Syracuse 62%
10/15 @ Florida State 4% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Army 86% ● 11/5 vs. Virginia 62%
11/12 @ Louisville 11% ● 11/19 vs. Clemson 9% ● 11/26 vs. Boston College 53%

7 Syracuse

COACH Dino Babers [1st season]

Dino Babers hopes the up-tempo attack he used at Bowling Green will revitalize an Orange unit that ranked 118th in the nation in yards per game and 116th in passing yards per game in 2015. The change in philosophy should lead to a much-improved offense, but the defensive line has huge holes to fill, and Cuse will struggle to make the strides needed to get back to a bowl. —A.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Eric Dungey

Dungey is the favorite to win the quarterback competition and orchestrate Babers' desired offensive transformation. In eight games as a true freshman last fall, he was responsible for 16 touchdowns and 1,649 yards of offense. Good news for Cuse: Dungey will run less in the new scheme—which means fewer chances for hits like the one that caused the ugly head injury that cost him the final four games in '15. But junior backup Zack Mahoney and early enrollee Rex Culppepper should stay ready: Due to injuries, Syracuse has used six different quarterbacks over the past two seasons.

● X-FACTOR WR Ervin Philips

Babers wants every player who was listed at RB/WR to settle into one spot or the other. For Philips, who took on more of a hybrid role in his first two years [accumulating 1,247 total yards rushing, receiving and returning], that means his days coming out of the backfield are numbered. The 5-foot-11, 180-pound junior will most likely line up in the slot to take advantage of his ability to make defenders miss.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

With the graduation or early departure of three of last season's top defensive ends and the offseason dismissal of three others, game experience at the position is a major concern. Redshirt freshman Jake Pickard will compete with converted TE Trey Dunkelberger and converted LB Kenneth Ruff. But don't be surprised if more reshuffling of the roster occurs, especially with Delaware State grad transfer Gabe Sherrod in the mix.

THE PRESSER

● Dungey made seven starts last season, the last five of them losses, but showed the mobility to make plays out of the pocket [43.9 rush yards per game last year]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW DUNGEY FITS INTO BABERS' SCHEME?** "The style of offense they're going to play, where they have quarterback-run type of plays, could be an asset to them, and he has the ability to get the ball outside if you're either outleveraged or in one-on-one matchups." —ACC defensive coach

● Syracuse returns 97 percent of its overall offensive production from a unit that ranked 118th in the FBS, and it still isn't clear whether the Orange have the personnel to implement Babers' new offense [Bowling Green ranked fourth in yards per game]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT BABERS TO DO IN YEAR 1?** "They're going to oversplit you on the wide receivers, they're going to tempo you, they're going to throw the ball vertically down the field. And that's great. But where is their personnel, and how does it match what he wants to do? Everybody thinks that's the secret sauce, that offense, so we'll see how their personnel is." —ACC head coach

● The Orange might have significant issues on defense given the inexperience and depth issues at defensive end. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THIS YOUNG DEFENSE WILL ADAPT?** "That's going to be an Achilles' heel there, for sure. Rome's not built in a day. That part is going to be hard on defense." —ACC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 [2-6]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Eric Dungey: **1,298** yards

RUSHING Jordan Fredericks: **607** yards

RECEIVING Steve Ishmael: **570** yards

TACKLES Zaire Franklin: **81**

SACKS Ron Thompson: **7**

INTERCEPTIONS Cordell Hudson: **2**

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Eric Dungey	So. 6-3 212 ●
RB	Dontae Strickland	So. 5-11 196 ●
WR	Ervin Philips	Jr. 5-11 180 ●
WR	Brisly Estime	Sr. 5-9 182 ●
WR	Steve Ishmael	Jr. 6-2 202 ●
WR	Alvin Cornelius	Sr. 6-1 187 ●
C	Jason Emerich	Sr. 6-3 284 ●
RG	Omari Palmer	Sr. 6-3 321 ●
LG	Aaron Roberts	So. 6-4 300 ●
RT	Jamar McGloster	Jr. 6-7 330 ●
LT	Michael Lasker	Sr. 6-5 318 ●
K	Cole Murphy	Jr. 6-3 197 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Gabe Sherrod	Sr. 6-4 240 ●
DT	Chris Slayton	So. 6-4 297 ●
NT	Kayton Samuels	So. 6-0 318 ●
DE	Jake Pickard	RFr. 6-5 262 ●
WLB	Parris Bennett	Jr. 6-0 218 ●
MLB	Zaire Franklin	Jr. 6-0 229 ●
SLB	Jonathan Thomas	Jr. 6-1 205 ●
CB	Corey Winfield	Jr. 6-1 191 ●
CB	Cordell Hudson	So. 5-11 175 ●
SS	Antwan Cordy	Jr. 5-8 180 ●
FS	Chauncey Scissum	Jr. 6-2 210 ●
P	Sterling Hofrichter	RFr. 5-9 181 ●

23

Ishmael had 23 catches for first downs, 10 more than Syracuse's next-best player.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.1 ● FPI CHANCE SYRACUSE WINS

9/2 vs. Colgate **97%** ● **9/9** vs. Louisville **19%** ● **9/17** vs. South Florida **48%** ● **9/24** @ Connecticut **56%**
10/1 vs. Notre Dame [East Rutherford, N.J.] **15%** ● **10/8** @ Wake Forest **38%**
10/15 vs. Virginia Tech **40%** ● **10/22** @ Boston College **30%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Clemson **5%**
11/12 vs. NC State **42%** ● **11/19** vs. Florida State **7%** ● **11/26** @ Pittsburgh **18%**

1 North Carolina

COACH Larry Fedora (5th season)
32-20 (1-2 in bowl games)

Critics have long wondered why North Carolina hasn't develop into an annual title hopeful as it has in basketball. Now it seems that Larry Fedora might have the program on the cusp of contention as he goes for consecutive seasons with double-digit wins, which would mark the first time the Tar Heels have done that in nearly two decades. —Jared Shanker

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Mitch Trubisky

The run-pass and option responsibilities in Fedora's spread offense can load a quarterback's plate, but starter Trubisky is in his fourth year in this system. The junior has never started, but he nearly won the job in 2014 over Marquise Williams and even replaced an ineffective Williams for a game in 2015. He completed 40 of 47 attempts last season, and his 93.3 QBR was first nationally among quarterbacks with at least 40 attempts.

● X-FACTOR DT Nazair Jones

Last year Jones missed four games, but his absence was never felt more than in the bowl game against Baylor—the Heels set a bowl record with 645 rushing yards allowed. No, it wasn't entirely because Jones wasn't there, but it does help demonstrate just how central the 6-foot-5, 300-pound junior defensive tackle is to the interior of a defense that was No. 121 nationally against the rush last season. He could blossom into one of the conference's better linemen after just 40 tackles last season.

● POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

Jeff Schoettmer and Shakeel Rashad accounted for most of the tackles from the linebacker position (223 combined) last fall. But now that they've graduated, sophomore Andre Smith and junior Cayson Collins are the only returning linebackers with at least 20 tackles in 2015—they combined for 91. Smith can play strong or inside linebacker, which gives the Heels flexibility as they fill out the unit with a number of younger players, led by early enrollee Jonathan Smith.

THE PRESSER

● North Carolina was an onside kick away from a conference championship last season, and the Heels won at least 10 games for the first time since 1997. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER UNC IS HERE TO STAY?** "They have the potential to be just as good as last year. [Trubisky] is more of a passer, more of a pro-style guy. Marquise was a college version of Cam Newton. The question is how well will the defense play, because the offense won't drop [off] much." —ACC defensive coach

● Six of the top seven receivers from 2015 return, including Mack Hollins, whose 24.8 yards per reception led the country, and Ryan Switzer, who tied for the team high with 55 catches and is considered one of the best slot receivers in the conference. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RECEIVERS?** "Hollins is one of the most underrated receivers in the conference. Switzer causes problems in the slot because he's matched against a safety. If you can't get pressure, they go over the top." —ACC defensive coach

● Gene Chizik, a Broyles Award finalist in his first season as coordinator, shaved two touchdowns from the 2014 defense's scoring average. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CHIZIK'S IMPACT?** "Their philosophy has been to stop you with six, seven guys in the box and play coverage to not allow you to hit the big play. Coverages that generally you play on third down, they're playing on first and second down and banking that they can stop the run with their down linemen and linebackers." —ACC offensive coach

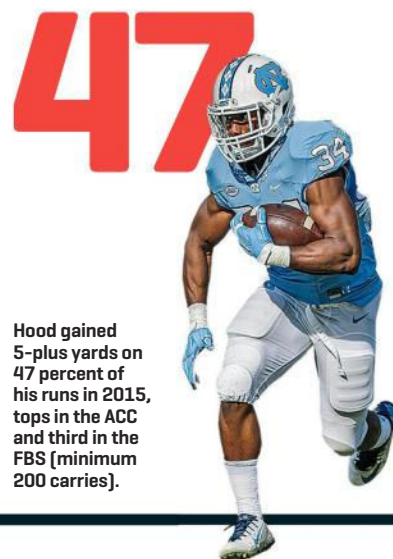
LAST SEASON

RECORD 11-3 (8-0)
BOWL GAME Russell Athletic Bowl vs. Baylor, 49-38 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Marquise Williams: 3,072 yards
RUSHING **Elijah Hood: 1,463 yards**
RECEIVING **Mack Hollins: 745 yards**
TACKLES **Donnie Miles: 128**
SACKS **Mikey Bart: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **M.J. Stewart: 4**

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Mitch Trubisky	Jr.	6-3 220
RB	Elijah Hood	Jr.	6-0 220 ●
WR	Bug Howard	Sr.	6-5 210
WR	Mack Hollins	Sr.	6-4 210 ●
WR	Ryan Switzer	Sr.	5-10 185 ●
TE	Brandon Fritts	So.	6-4 245
C	Lucas Crowley	Sr.	6-3 290 ●
RG	John Ferranto	Sr.	6-6 300
LG	Caleb Peterson	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
RT	Jon Heck	Sr.	6-7 300 ●
LT	Bentley Spain	Jr.	6-6 300 ●
K	Nick Weiler	Sr.	6-0 190 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Dajaun Drennon	Jr.	6-4 255 ●
DT	Nazair Jones	Jr.	6-5 300 ●
DT	Jalen Dalton	So.	6-6 280
DE	Mikey Bart	Sr.	6-3 270 ●
WLB	J.B. Copeland	Jr.	6-2 205
MLB	Andre Smith	So.	6-0 235 ●
SLB	Cayson Collins	Jr.	6-1 235
CB	M.J. Stewart	Jr.	5-11 200 ●
CB	Des Lawrence	Sr.	6-1 185 ●
SS	Donnie Miles	Jr.	5-11 200 ●
FS	Dominique Green	Sr.	5-11 190
P	Joey Mangili	Sr.	6-3 205 ●



Hood gained 5-plus yards on 47 percent of his runs in 2015, tops in the ACC and third in the FBS (minimum 200 carries).

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.4 ● FPI CHANCE NORTH CAROLINA WINS

9/3 vs. Georgia (Atlanta) **38%** ● **9/10** @ Illinois **81%** ● **9/17** vs. James Madison **98%**
9/24 vs. Pittsburgh **67%** ● **10/1** @ Florida State **14%** ● **10/8** vs. Virginia Tech **72%**
10/15 @ Miami (Fla.) **47%** ● **10/22** @ Virginia **78%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Georgia Tech **83%**
11/10 @ Duke **75%** ● **11/19** vs. The Citadel **98%** ● **11/25** vs. NC State **77%**

2 Miami (Fla.)

COACH Mark Richt [1st season]

The hiring of Mark Richt has Miami fans dreaming of the early 2000s and clamoring, “The U is back!” While there is still a clear talent discrepancy between Miami and the ACC’s top playoff contenders, a Coastal Division title is within reach—and that’s enough to rile up a fan base that hasn’t cheered for a conference champ since the Canes joined the ACC. —J.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Brad Kaaya

Kaaya, a junior, has started since his freshman season and is one of the ACC’s best players—and maybe even one of the country’s best quarterbacks. Last year he threw for 16 TDs and just 5 INTs (tied for third best in the ACC), and he should excel under Richt, who uses more traditional pocket passers. Last season Kaaya was second in the ACC behind Deshaun Watson in total pass yards and completions of more than 20 yards.

● X-FACTOR DL coach Craig Kuligowski

While at Missouri, Kuligowski developed four future NFL first-rounders along the defensive line—and that was without the kind of blue-chip prospects that Miami boasts. So Miami fans are salivating at what the Canes’ new defensive line coach will do with the likes of juniors Al-Quadin Muhammad and Chad Thomas—both of whom are capable of 10 sacks in a season but have yet to truly tap into their talent.

● POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

An improved offensive line is pivotal to any potential turnaround. Junior LT Trevor Darling returns and likely will anchor an experienced unit that needs to live up to the Miami pedigree. The group returns nearly every start, but the new regime could shake up the depth chart. Kc McDermott and Alex Gall will battle at left guard, unless McDermott wins the right tackle job from Sunny Odogwu, who is recovering from an MCL injury. With new OL coach Stacy Searels demanding improvement on all fronts, even Darling’s job isn’t secure.

THE PRESSER

● Richt won two conference titles at Georgia, and although that wasn’t enough for Bulldogs fans, Miami faithful eager for a championship taste would be thrilled with an ACC title and playoff contention. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RICHT HIRE?** “He’s going to do a great job. To me, they’re a sleeping giant. What Miami has done and how they’ve tried to run their offense is what Georgia has done. It’s a great hire, and it’s going to get them back in the mix.” —ACC defensive coach

● Miami has earned a reputation as one of the FBS’s more confounding programs, playing like a title contender one week and falling flat the next. Last year? A 10-point win vs. Virginia Tech followed by a 58-point pummeling by Clemson. That’s plagued Miami for a decade. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CANES’ INCONSISTENCY?** “At times they play with anyone and look like ‘The U,’ and other times they’ve cashed in their chips and are ready to go home. You didn’t know what Miami you’d get. That won’t happen with Richt.” —ACC offensive coach

● The Canes keep signing blue-chip defensive line recruits with impressive résumés, but they are not producing once they arrive in Coral Gables. Only once since 2011 has the defense finished in the top 50 nationally in sacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE GROUP KULIGOWSKI INHERITS?** “They’re talented, but when you identify them, I don’t know how hard they play. I don’t know if it was because of the situation with the coach, but you didn’t get the traditional effort of a Miami team.” —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 [5–3]

BOWL GAME Hyundai Sun Bowl

vs. Washington State, 20–14 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Brad Kaaya: 3,238 yards

RUSHING Joseph Yearby: 1,002 yards

RECEIVING Rashawn Scott: 695 yards

TACKLES Jermaine Grace: 79

SACKS Al-Quadin Muhammad: 5

INTERCEPTIONS Artie Burns: 6

PHIL STEELE’S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Brad Kaaya	Jr. 6–4 210 ●
RB	Joseph Yearby	Jr. 5–9 202 ●
WR	Braxton Berrios	Jr. 5–9 180
WR	Stacy Coley	Sr. 6–1 187 ●
WR	Lawrence Cager	So. 6–5 215
TE	David Njoku	So. 6–4 244 ●
C	Nick Linder	Jr. 6–3 302 ●
RG	Danny Isidora	Sr. 6–4 325 ●
LG	Kc McDermott	Jr. 6–6 310 ●
RT	Tyree St. Louis	So. 6–5 312 ●
LT	Trevor Darling	Jr. 6–5 316 ●
K	Michael Badgley	Jr. 5–10 180 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Chad Thomas	Jr. 6–5 275
NT	Anthony Moten	Jr. 6–4 299 ●
DT	Gerald Willis	So. 6–2 280
DE	Al-Quadin Muhammad	Jr. 6–3 256 ●
WLB	Trent Harris	Jr. 6–2 251 ●
MLB	Shaquille Quarterman	Fr. 6–1 239
SLB	Jermaine Grace	Sr. 6–1 221 ●
CB	Sheldrick Redwine	So. 6–1 196
CB	Corn Elder	Sr. 5–10 183 ●
SS	Jamal Carter	Sr. 6–1 209
FS	Rayshawn Jenkins	Sr. 6–1 208 ●
P	Justin Vogel	Sr. 6–4 208 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.6 ● FPI CHANCE MIAMI WINS

9/3 vs. Florida A&M **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Florida Atlantic **96%** ● **9/17** @ Appalachian State **73%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** @ Georgia Tech **63%** ● **10/8** vs. Florida State **21%** ● **10/15** vs. North Carolina **53%**
10/20 @ Virginia Tech **53%** ● **10/29** @ Notre Dame **26%** ● **11/5** vs. Pittsburgh **62%**
11/12 @ Virginia **72%** ● **11/19** @ NC State **56%** ● **11/26** vs. Duke **82%**

98.4



Kaaya had a 98.4 QBR on fourth down in 2015, third among qualified Power 5 QBs.

3 Pittsburgh

After four consecutive 6-6 regular seasons under Todd Graham and Paul Chryst, Pitt finally saw some improvement in Pat Narduzzi's first year, earning eight wins and its first national ranking since 2010 (No. 23 after Week 8). Realistically, the roster still might be a year away, but an unpredictable Coastal Division could have Pitt vying for an ACC title-game appearance. —J.S.

COACH Pat Narduzzi [2nd season]
8-5 [0-1 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 [6-2]
BOWL GAME Military Bowl Presented by Northrop Grumman vs. Navy, 44-28 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Nathan Peterman: 2,287 yards
RUSHING Qadree Ollison: 1,121 yards
RECEIVING Tyler Boyd: 926 yards
TACKLES Jordan Whitehead: 109
SACKS Ejuan Price: 11½
INTERCEPTIONS Avonte Maddox: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Nathan Peterman

In his first season at Pitt as a graduate transfer from Tennessee, Peterman was solid but unspectacular. Yes, he threw for 20 TDs, but his yards per attempt and yards per completion were both in the bottom half of ACC QBs. Peterman will have more pressure on him with top receiver Tyler Boyd (926 yards in 12 games) off to the NFL, so he'll need to find ways to make plays downfield to complement Pitt's top rushing attack.

● X-FACTOR DE Dewayne Hendrix

The defensive line returns several key players, including Ejuan Price, the ACC leader in sacks per game [0.89], who was granted a sixth year of eligibility. But the pivotal piece is Hendrix, a coveted recruit who rarely played as a freshman at Tennessee before following Peterman to Pitt in the spring of 2015. Narduzzi says Hendrix, a former ESPN 300 recruit, thrilled coaches with his play on the scout team and in bowl prep last year. He should be in position to challenge Price for his sack crown.

● POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

For Peterman to excel in the passing game, the Panthers will need several players to emerge at receiver and tight end. Boyd caught 43 percent of all passes in 2015, 65 more than second-leading receiver Dontez Ford [26 for 505 yards, 19.4 ypc]. Zach Challosworth and Qadree Henderson will also compete for catches, but sophomore Tre Tipton, a running QB and wide receiver in high school, might be best suited to replicate Boyd's all-purpose style.

THE PRESSER

● James Conner missed nearly all of last season with a knee injury, then was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in November. He has worked out with the team throughout his cancer treatment, and Pitt hopes he returns this fall to his 2014 form, when he rushed for 1,765 yards and 26 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CONNER?** "He's one of the best backs I've seen. He's strong, hard to tackle and that style wears on you. After a while you don't want to hit him anymore. You don't see a lot of guys like him these days." —ACC defensive coach

● When Conner rejoins the team, he'll enter a backfield with the ACC's 2015 offensive rookie of the year. In Conner's absence, sophomore Qadree Ollison rushed for 1,121 yards and 11 scores. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING THE OFFENSE?** "You have to try to create turnovers against them and win third downs. We don't recruit to that same physical stature, and not many people in our conference do. You're not gonna whip them up front. You have to force mistakes." —ACC defensive coach

● Narduzzi came to Pitt with the rep as an elite defensive mind. There's still room for improvement, but the D is trending up: Pitt's 37 sacks in 2015 was tied for 14th best among Power 5 teams and nearly double its total from 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NARDUZZI'S DEFENSIVE APTITUDE?** "Schematically, it's difficult because he sends you a lot of problems. He'll do a lot of twists, stunts and blitzes in base. But it does put some pressure on the back end of the defense. There are opportunities for big plays." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Nathan Peterman	Sr.	6-2 225 ●
RB	Qadree Ollison	So.	6-2 230 ●
TE	Jaymar Parrish	Sr.	6-2 270
WR	Dontez Ford	Sr.	6-2 215 ●
WR	Jester Weah	Jr.	6-3 205
TE	Scott Orndoff	Sr.	6-5 265 ●
C	Alex Officer	Jr.	6-4 335 ●
RG	Alex Bookser	So.	6-6 310
LG	Dorian Johnson	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
RT	Brian O'Neill	So.	6-6 300 ●
LT	Adam Bisnowaty	Sr.	6-6 300 ●
K	Chris Blewitt	Sr.	5-9 190 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Dewayne Hendrix	So.	6-4 270 ●
NT	Tyrique Jarrett	Sr.	6-3 335 ●
DT	Shakir Soto	Sr.	6-3 285
DE	Ejuan Price	Sr.	6-0 250 ●
WLB	Mike Caprara	Sr.	6-0 230 ●
MLB	Matt Galambos	Sr.	6-2 240 ●
SLB	Elijah Zeise	So.	6-2 215
CB	Damar Hamlin	Fr.	6-1 185
CB	Avonte Maddox	Jr.	5-9 170 ●
SS	Jordan Whitehead	So.	5-11 185 ●
FS	Terrish Webb	Sr.	5-11 190 ●
P	Ryan Winslow	Jr.	6-5 210 ●

5

Ollison became the fifth Pitt freshman to rush for 1,000 yards, including a 207-yard debut.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE PITTSBURGH WINS

9/3 vs. Villanova 97% ● 9/10 vs. Penn State 63% ● 9/17 @ Oklahoma State 24%
9/24 @ North Carolina 33% ● 10/1 vs. Marshall 86% ● 10/8 vs. Georgia Tech 74%
10/15 @ Virginia 68% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/27 vs. Virginia Tech 70% ● 11/5 @ Miami [Fla.] 38%
11/12 @ Clemson 13% ● 11/19 vs. Duke 79% ● 11/26 vs. Syracuse 82%

4 Virginia Tech

COACH Justin Fuente [1st season]

Landing Memphis coach Justin Fuente to replace Frank Beamer has been widely praised, and there's hope that the Hokies could be back in ACC contention in his first season. Longtime defensive coordinator Bud Foster stayed on under the new regime, so Fuente can focus much of his attention on retrofitting a broken offense to his up-tempo style. —J.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Travon McMillian

Who will emerge as the starting quarterback is anyone's guess, but at least the Hokies have one constant in the backfield in McMillian, a sophomore. Though the running back averaged only 8.4 carries through the first seven games in 2015, he caught fire over the final six contests, getting the ball 23.5 times per game and becoming the first Hokie since 2011 to gain 96 yards or more in five straight games.

● X-FACTOR DE Vinny Mihota

A rotational player his first season, Mihota is pegged to replace All-ACC pass rusher Dadi Nicolas. Since 2004, no program has more sacks than Virginia Tech's 439. And while the 6-foot-5, 270-pound Mihota moves into a starting spot without much experience, in limited snaps he showed he can help in a variety of ways: He blocked a kick against Pitt and forced a critical fumble against North Carolina.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Last year Brenden Motley played admirably as the backup to senior Michael Brewer—he completed 56.1 percent of his passes and threw for 11 TDs with seven interceptions—but he won't just slide into the starting role. Fourth-ranked juco quarterback Jerod Evans joined the fold in the spring, and former ESPN 300 signal-caller Dwayne Lawson might be ready to start as a sophomore. Whoever earns the starting job likely will be raw, but Fuente is credited with developing Andy Dalton and Paxton Lynch, so there is valid cause for optimism.

THE PRESSER

● The Hokies routinely had elite talent in their backfield under Beamer, but the program lacked a 1,000-yard receiver until Isaiah Ford led the ACC with 1,164 in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FORD'S IMPACT?** "He's dynamic, moves the chains and makes big plays. Everyone would want him on their team. They'd say 'I'd take him' from Miami to Notre Dame. He'll make them better, and there's not many players you could say that about on every team." —ACC offensive coach

● Foster hopes to be a head coach, but when it became clear he wouldn't succeed Beamer, he was open to staying on. Few coordinators are as respected as Foster, who has coached a top-three scoring defense six times in his career. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FOSTER'S RETURN?** "It's a magical move by Fuente. Foster is one of the pre-eminent coordinators in college football and is able to attract all kinds of players. He can scheme against any offense." —ACC defensive coach

● The defense was 39th among Power 5 teams in yards per pass attempt, its worst ranking since 2008. Before the precipitous fall last season, the Hokies had finished among the top 30 every year since 2009. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SECONDARY?** "They don't have the secondary they've had in the past. They don't have a guy comparable to [former player Kendall Fuller] to complement Brandon Facyson. The safeties traditionally are very good, but the safeties in that secondary didn't make the same impact." —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 (4-4)

BOWL GAME Camping World Independence Bowl vs. Tulsa, 55-52 W

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Michael Brewer: 1,703 yards

RUSHING Travon McMillian: 1,043 yards

RECEIVING Isaiah Ford: 1,164 yards

TACKLES Chuck Clark: 107

SACKS Ken Ekanem: 4½

INTERCEPTIONS Adonis Alexander: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Jerod Evans	Jr. 6-4 235
RB	Travon McMillian	So. 6-0 200 ●
WR	Divine Deable	Fr. 6-3 210
WR	Isaiah Ford	Jr. 6-2 190 ●
WR	Cam Phillips	Jr. 6-1 198 ●
TE	Bucky Hodges	Jr. 6-7 245 ●
C	Eric Gallo	Jr. 6-2 297 ●
RG	Augie Conte	Sr. 6-6 303 ●
LG	Wyatt Teller	Jr. 6-5 304 ●
RT	Parker Osterloh	Jr. 6-8 329
LT	Jonathan McLaughlin	Sr. 6-5 292 ●
K	Joey Slye	Jr. 6-1 207 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Vinny Mihota	So. 6-5 270
NT	Woody Baron	Sr. 6-1 275 ●
DT	Nigel Williams	Sr. 6-4 295
DE	Ken Ekanem	Sr. 6-3 255 ●
LB	Tremaine Edmunds	So. 6-5 236
LB	Andrew Motuapuaka	Jr. 6-0 235 ●
LB	Anthony Shegog	Jr. 6-3 212
CB	Brandon Facyson	Jr. 6-2 191 ●
CB	Adonis Alexander	So. 6-3 197 ●
SS	Terrell Edmunds	So. 6-1 201 ●
FS	Chuck Clark	Sr. 6-1 204 ●
P	Mitchell Ludwig	Jr. 5-11 200

12

Ford caught 12 of his 26 targets at least 25 yards downfield, tied for most in the Power 5.



JAMES HASKINS/ICON SPORTSWIRE

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.5 ● **FPI CHANCE VIRGINIA TECH WINS**

9/3 vs. Liberty **98%** ● **9/10** vs. Tennessee (Bristol, Tenn.) **14%** ● **9/17** vs. Boston College **69%**
9/24 vs. East Carolina **89%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/8** @ North Carolina **28%** ● **10/15** @ Syracuse **60%**
10/20 vs. Miami (Fla) **47%** ● **10/27** @ Pittsburgh **30%** ● **11/5** @ Duke **59%**
11/12 vs. Georgia Tech **65%** ● **11/19** @ Notre Dame **20%** ● **11/26** vs. Virginia **75%**

5 Georgia Tech

COACH Paul Johnson (9th season)
62-44* [2-5 in bowl games]

Paul Johnson is one of those coaches who seem to have a season ticket for the hot seat, and he appears headed back there in 2016 after a 3-9 season that began with talk of the playoff. Just two years ago, this program won 11 games, and the upcoming season will go a long way toward showing whether Georgia Tech can rally—and whether Johnson will be there to see it. —J.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Justin Thomas

Thomas was a Heisman Trophy dark horse after an impressive 2014 in which he was the third-best rushing QB in the FBS. But last year Thomas finished the season with 972 fewer total yards than he accumulated in 2014. That's in large part due to reduced production rushing the ball: His 488 yards last year was less than half of his 2014 total on just 45 fewer attempts. Georgia Tech can't win the ACC without Thomas re-emerging as one of the conference's best players and nearing 1,000 rushing yards again.

● X-FACTOR RB Marcus Marshall

Marshall led the team in rushing as a freshman last season, but more than a quarter of his 654 yards came against Alcorn State in the opener—and his team-leading season total would have been good for just fourth on the 2014 squad. Marshall brings unique speed to the position—his three rushes of 50 yards or more was tied for second in the ACC. But he needs to produce against ACC teams; he had more than 10 rush attempts just twice in eight conference games last year.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive back

Last season's secondary fielded four senior starters, so there are several roles up for grabs on a unit that was solid in pass defense in 2015 (1.33 TD-to-INT rate, fifth best in the ACC, and 7.23 yards allowed per attempt). More than a dozen DBs could compete for the four roles: twin brothers Lance and Lawrence Austin, Step Durham, A.J. Gray and Corey Griffin are among those best positioned to earn starting spots.

THE PRESSER

● Production dropped in almost every offensive category last year, including a 23-point dip in third-down conversion rate—the product of a ground attack that couldn't provide manageable down-and-distance opportunities. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THEIR OFFENSE GETS BACK ON TRACK?** "They were doing too much last year. When they're good, they're simple. They don't have those same big-time athletes, and they're trying to throw too much. Everybody usually hates playing that offense." —ACC offensive coach

● Georgia Tech ranks 90th in defensive win probability since 2013, the year Ted Roof became defensive coordinator. The Jackets were 78th in Johnson's first five seasons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER JOHNSON'S OFFENSE HINDERS HIS DEFENSE?** "I feel for Roof because what you're practicing against him you never use in a game. You're playing a triple-option team every day, then all of a sudden, 'Go defend empty.'" —ACC offensive coach

● When GT throws, it often looks deep downfield to its big targets. Four times since 2009 a Yellow Jackets receiver has finished among the top eight nationally in yards per catch, including 6-foot-3, 212-pound Ricky Jeune in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING THEIR RECEIVERS?** "First thing is to get your run/pass read against those receivers, and then you shouldn't be caught off guard. It's obvious when they're going to throw. The biggest thing with those guys is they make plays." —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [1-7]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Justin Thomas: **1,345** yards

RUSHING Marcus Marshall: **654** yards

RECEIVING Ricky Jeune: **520** yards

TACKLES P.J. Davis: **77**

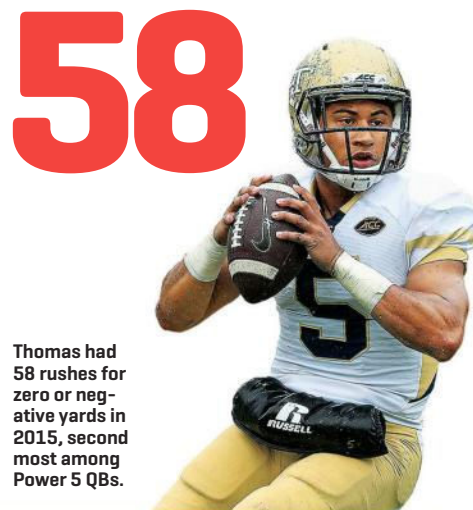
SACKS Adam Gotsis: **3**

INTERCEPTIONS Brant Mitchell: **2**

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Justin Thomas	Sr.	5-11 185 ●
RB	Marcus Marshall	So.	5-10 212 ●
RB	Clinton Lynch	So.	6-0 187 ●
RB	Isiah Willis	Sr.	5-9 193 ●
WR	Mikell Lands-Davis	So.	5-11 208 ●
WR	Ricky Jeune	Jr.	6-3 212 ●
C	Freddie Burden	Sr.	6-4 299 ●
RG	Shamire Devine	Jr.	6-7 386 ●
LG	Will Bryan	So.	6-4 281 ●
RT	Trey Klock	So.	6-4 285 ●
LT	Eason Fromayan	Jr.	6-4 285 ●
K	Harrison Butker	Sr.	6-3 210 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Rod Rook-Chungong	Sr.	6-3 245 ●
NT	Francis Kallion	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
DT	Patrick Gamble	Sr.	6-5 277 ●
DE	KeShun Freeman	Jr.	6-1 250 ●
LB	Brant Mitchell	So.	6-2 236 ●
LB	P.J. Davis	Sr.	5-11 231 ●
LB	Terrell Lewis	Jr.	6-2 217 ●
CB	Step Durham	Jr.	5-11 194 ●
CB	Lawrence Austin	Jr.	5-9 185 ●
SS	Corey Griffin	Jr.	6-2 195 ●
FS	A.J. Gray	So.	6-1 215 ●
P	Ryan Rodwell	Sr.	6-2 188 ●



Thomas had 58 rushes for zero or negative yards in 2015, second most among Power 5 QBs.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● FPI CHANCE GEORGIA TECH WINS

9/3 vs. Boston College [Dublin, Ireland] **51%** ● 9/10 vs. Mercer **98%** ● 9/17 vs. Vanderbilt **66%**
9/22 vs. Clemson **12%** ● 10/1 vs. Miami [Fla.] **37%** ● 10/8 @ Pittsburgh **26%**
10/15 vs. Georgia Southern **78%** ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Duke **66%** ● 11/5 @ North Carolina **17%**
11/12 @ Virginia Tech **35%** ● 11/19 vs. Virginia **71%** ● 11/26 @ Georgia **14%**

6 Duke

COACH David Cutcliffe (9th season)
48-53 (1-3 in bowl games)

How things have changed in Durham that, just four years removed from consecutive three-win seasons, a 7-5 record evoked mild disappointment. Of course, that was before the year closed with a 44-41 OT win over Indiana in the Pinstripe Bowl, Duke's first bowl triumph since the 1960 season. Now there's renewed hope that the Blue Devils can recapture the division crown. —J.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Shaun Wilson

With QB Thomas Sirk out indefinitely (ruptured left Achilles), the Blue Devils will expect greater contributions from their running backs, giving ample opportunity for Wilson to break big gains. The Pinstripe Bowl co-MVP had Duke's longest run of the season and averaged 5.9 ypc. The junior showed he's capable of scoring from anywhere on the field in the Blue Devils' 2015 finale, with an 85-yard rushing TD in the first quarter and a 98-yard kickoff TD return near game's end.

● X-FACTOR DL coach Ben Albert

Pass-rush issues sank the defense last season (7.77 yards per attempt, third worst in the ACC), so Duke hired Ben Albert as D-line coach. At Boston College in 2013, Albert inherited a group that had six sacks the previous season but would go on to finish top five in the ACC in sacks the next three years. The best news for Blue Devils fans: Albert did it with under-the-radar talent similar to Duke's.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

Defensive tackle A.J. Wolf is the lone returning starter from the front four, and the staff is comfortable with the line's interior. So now Albert needs to identify a few defensive ends with pass-rush potential. Sophomore Marquies Price was the team's third-best pass rusher last season—faint praise, as he finished with just 1½ sacks. Allen Jackson and Dominic McDonald are upperclassmen, but they've combined for only 10 tackles in their careers. Keep an eye on redshirt freshman Trevon McSwain (6-6, 265 pounds).

THE PRESSER

● Sirk was inconsistent in his first year as the starter (8 INTs in 12 games), but he is by far the most experienced QB on the roster. Junior Parker Boehme, who is expected to replace him, has one career start. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE OFFENSE FARES WITHOUT SIRK?** "The system will work with whoever that guy is, but they also will manipulate their offense to that guy's skill set. They'll still be a factor because of Cut and his ability to coach and put kids in a good position to compete and perform and excel." —ACC defensive coach

● The offense failed to produce a 1,000-yard receiver last season for the first time since 2011—graduated WR Max McCaffrey's 643 yards was the lowest team high since Cutcliffe's arrival. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DUKE'S RECEIVERS?** "They had some guys who were productive. McCaffrey was a good possession guy, but I felt like we matched up well scheme-wise with what they did, and I also felt good about the physical matchups." —ACC defensive coach

● Through seven games, this defense was ranked No. 5 nationally in win probability added. Then the pass rush disappeared (three sacks in the final six games). Even so, the D has made significant strides under longtime Cutcliffe assistant Jim Knowles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSE COULD BE A STRENGTH ALL SEASON?** "It's as multiple a defense as there is in the conference, with many, many coverage units and zone pressures. They're a pain in the ass, to be quite honest." —ACC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (4-4)

BOWL GAME New Era Pinstripe Bowl vs. Indiana, 44-41 W [OT]

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Thomas Sirk: 2,625 yards

RUSHING Thomas Sirk: 803 yards

RECEIVING Max McCaffrey: 643 yards

TACKLES Dwayne Norman: 114

SACKS Jeremy Cash: 2½

INTERCEPTIONS Breon Borders: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Parker Boehme	Jr. 6-2 220 ●
RB	Shaun Wilson	Jr. 5-9 180
WR	Anthony Nash	Sr. 6-5 200 ●
WR	T.J. Rahming	So. 5-10 165 ●
WR	Scott Bracey	Fr. 6-2 200
TE	Daniel Helm	So. 6-4 240
C	Austin Davis	Jr. 6-4 290
RG	Tanner Stone	Sr. 6-6 300 ●
LG	Zach Baker	RFr. 6-4 295
RT	Casey Blaser	Sr. 6-5 290 ●
LT	Gabe Brandner	Jr. 6-6 285 ●
K	Austin Reed	Fr. 5-11 175

DEFENSE

DE	Trevon McSwain	RFr. 6-6 265
NG	A.J. Wolf	Sr. 6-4 270 ●
DT	Mike Ramsay	Jr. 6-2 295
DE	Marquies Price	So. 6-6 210
LB	Tinashe Bere	So. 6-1 230 ●
LB	Ben Humphreys	So. 6-2 210
DB	Phillip Carter	Jr. 6-1 195
CB	DeVon Edwards	Sr. 5-9 180 ●
CB	Breon Borders	Sr. 6-0 175 ●
SS	Corbin McCarthy	Sr. 5-10 200 ●
FS	Deondre Singleton	Sr. 5-11 180 ●
P	Austin Parker	RFr. 6-1 180

3



Edwards returned three kickoffs for TDs last year, tied for second most in the nation.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0 ● FPI CHANCE DUKE WINS

9/3 vs. NC Central 98% ● 9/10 vs. Wake Forest 57% ● 9/17 @ Northwestern 38%

9/24 @ Notre Dame 12% ● 10/1 vs. Virginia 62% ● 10/8 vs. Army 82%

10/14 @ Louisville 10% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 @ Georgia Tech 34% ● 11/5 vs. Virginia Tech 41%

11/10 vs. North Carolina 25% ● 11/19 @ Pittsburgh 21% ● 11/26 @ Miami [Fla.] 18%

7 Virginia

COACH Bronco Mendenhall [1st season]

Landing Bronco Mendenhall was a surprise, but the former BYU coach appears to be an ideal fit at Virginia—the structure and discipline he was known for at BYU will be equally valued here. There is talent on the roster, and coupled with a manageable conference schedule, it might provide Mendenhall the opportunity to qualify for a bowl in Year 1. —J.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Taquan Mizzell

Mizzell led FBS backs with 75 catches and 721 yards. But Mendenhall teams like to hand the ball off; they're almost always in the top half of the FBS in rush attempts. So this fall, the 5-foot-10, 195-pound senior will need to prove he can increase his workload [he's never averaged more than 14 carries per game in a season]. He'll have the benefit of an experienced offensive line, so expect him to improve on last season's 671 rushing yards [12th in the ACC] and 4.1 yards per carry [19th].

● X-FACTOR DT Andrew Brown

Brown, along with safety Quin Blanding, was one of the five-star 2014 signees expected to flip the fortunes of Virginia, which was coming off a 2-10 season. But the DT spent his first two seasons in and out of the lineup with injuries, stunting his growth and impact. He's recorded a total of only 10 tackles in the past two seasons, never playing more than 10 games. Under Mendenhall, a former defensive coordinator, Brown should finally live up to his potential.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive line

Mendenhall is bringing a 3-4 scheme, and he's tasked with replacing a handful of starters along the defensive line. Brown's spot should be secure, but what pieces will surround him? While Andre Miles-Redmond has starting experience, how will he fare in a new scheme? Donte Wilkins and Chris Peace are two other contenders for starting positions, but don't expect a defined depth chart until well into preseason practice.

THE PRESSER

● Few saw the Mendenhall hire coming, but Virginia fans are excited about the new coach's track record, which includes five seasons with double-digit wins and two conference championships at BYU. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MENDENHALL?** "I played against and watched him. The scheme is good and he's proven. He's a tremendous guy who gets a lot out of players. That's been a little bit of the issue for Virginia—they look the part but do not play the part. I'd like to have some of them dudes when you see them walk out of the tunnel." —ACC offensive coach

● Quarterback problems have plagued the program, and Matt Johns, who likely will start for the second straight season, had his ups and downs in 2015. Johns had 20 TDs but threw 17 INTs [worst in the nation]; he was picked off in 10 of 12 games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JOHNS?** "I don't know if they can win with him. He's not a guy I'm willing to put a stamp on yet. He's got to prove it." —ACC offensive coach

● The offense took a step forward in 2015—though it almost had to, after a particularly anemic unit in 2014. Over the final seven games, UVa scored 40 points twice, 30 points and 27 points. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVING OFFENSE?** "The cupboard's not bare at Virginia. They've traditionally had one of the better offensive lines that we've played. I think they've improved themselves at the skill positions, so it's going to be an interesting matchup." —ACC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 [3-5]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Matt Johns: 2,810 yards

RUSHING Taquan Mizzell: 671 yards

RECEIVING Canaan Severin: 759 yards

TACKLES Micah Kiser: 117

SACKS Micah Kiser: 7½

INTERCEPTIONS Darious Latimore: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Matt Johns	Sr.	6-5 210 ●
RB	Taquan Mizzell	Sr.	5-10 202 ●
WR	Olamide Zaccheaus	So.	5-8 190 ●
WR	Andre Levrone	Jr.	6-2 215
WR	Doni Dowling	Jr.	6-1 215
TE	Evan Butts	So.	6-4 240
C	Jackson Matteo	Sr.	6-5 290 ●
RG	Jared Cohen	So.	6-4 295
LG	Jack McDonald	Jr.	6-5 290 ●
RT	Eric Smith	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
LT	Michael Mooney	Sr.	6-6 290
K	Dylan Sims	Sr.	6-0 190

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Eli Hanback	RFr.	6-4 285
DT	Donte Wilkins	Jr.	6-1 290
DT	Andrew Brown	Jr.	6-4 285
OLB	Cory Jones	So.	6-5 215
ILB	Micah Kiser	Jr.	6-2 240 ●
ILB	Zach Bradshaw	Sr.	6-3 235 ●
OLB	Malcolm Cook	Jr.	6-1 205
CB	Tim Harris	Sr.	6-2 200 ●
CB	Juan Thornhill	So.	6-1 200
SS	Kelvin Rainey	Sr.	6-1 195 ●
FS	Quin Blanding	Jr.	6-2 205 ●
P	Nicholas Conte	Sr.	6-3 225 ●

5 Five of Kiser's 7½ sacks in 2015 came on third down, fourth most in the ACC.



SCHEDULE

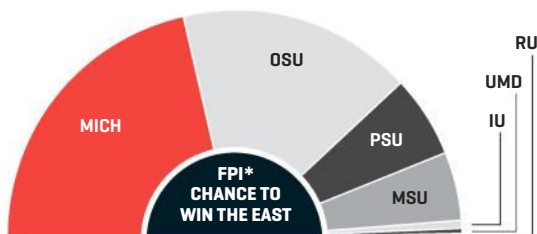
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.6 ● FPI CHANCE VIRGINIA WINS

9/3 vs. Richmond **91%** ● **9/10** @ Oregon **14%** ● **9/17** @ Connecticut **54%**
9/24 vs. Central Michigan **69%** ● **10/1** @ Duke **38%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Pittsburgh **32%**
10/22 vs. North Carolina **22%** ● **10/29** vs. Louisville **18%** ● **11/5** @ Wake Forest **39%**
11/12 vs. Miami [Fla.] **29%** ● **11/19** @ Georgia Tech **29%** ● **11/26** @ Virginia Tech **25%**

2016

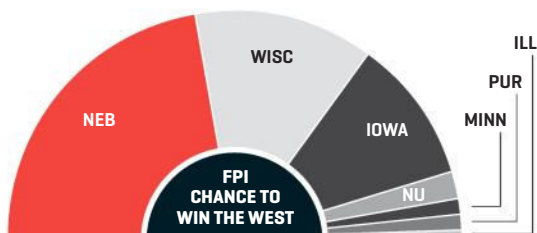
Big Ten outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
MICHIGAN	11	42.9%
OHIO STATE	17	33.7%
PENN STATE	35	11.7%
MICHIGAN STATE	34	11.0%
INDIANA	62	0.4%
MARYLAND	74	0.2%
RUTGERS	75	0.2%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
NEBRASKA	25	44.7%
WISCONSIN	31	25.7%
IOWA	38	20.6%
NORTHWESTERN	52	3.8%
MINNESOTA	65	2.4%
PURDUE	66	2.1%
ILLINOIS	73	0.9%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
47.0

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
29%
MICHIGAN

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **J.T. Barrett** Jr. Ohio State

ALL-BIG TEN

QB **J.T. Barrett** Jr. Ohio State
 RB **Saquon Barkley** So. Penn State
 RB **Corey Clement** Sr. Wisconsin
 WR **Jehu Chesson** Sr. Michigan
 WR **Jordan Westerkamp** Sr. Nebraska
 TE **Jake Butt** Sr. Michigan
 OL **Dan Feeney** Sr. Indiana
 OL **Pat Elflein** Sr. Ohio State
 OL **Brian Allen** Jr. Michigan State
 OL **Nick Gates** So. Nebraska
 OL **Mason Cole** Jr. Michigan

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DT **Malik McDowell** Jr. Michigan State

ALL-BIG TEN

DE **Sam Hubbard** So. Ohio State
 DE **Chris Wormley** Sr. Michigan
 DT **Malik McDowell** Jr. Michigan State
 LB **Anthony Walker** Jr. Northwestern
 LB **Raekwon McMillan** Jr. Ohio State
 LB **Riley Bullough** Sr. Michigan State
 LB **Jabrill Peppers** So. Michigan
 CB **Desmond King** Sr. Iowa
 CB **Jourdan Lewis** Sr. Michigan
 S **Damarius Travis** Sr. Minnesota
 S **Nate Gerry** Sr. Nebraska

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Drew Brown** Jr. Nebraska
 P **Cameron Johnston** Sr. Ohio State
 RS **William Likely** Sr. Maryland

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

9/3 Wisconsin vs. LSU [87*]
 9/17 Ohio State @ Oklahoma [88]
 9/24 Penn State @ Michigan [78]

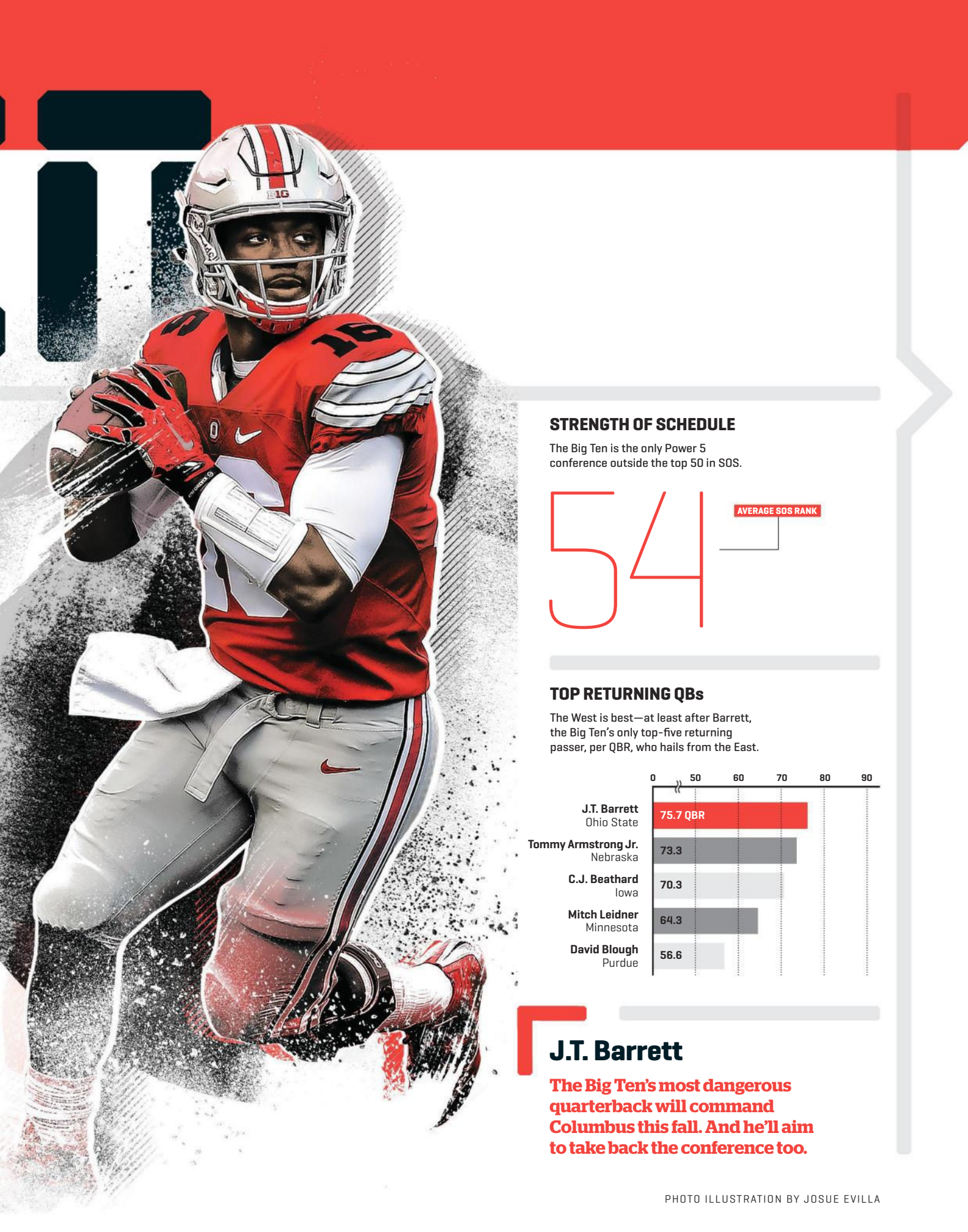
OCTOBER

10/1 Wisconsin @ Michigan [79]
 10/15 Ohio State @ Wisconsin [79]
 10/29 Michigan @ Michigan State [78]

NOVEMBER

11/5 Nebraska @ Ohio State [80]
 11/19 Ohio State @ Michigan State [77]
 11/26 Michigan @ Ohio State [85]

*Matchup quality [0-100 scale] rates games based on team strength [FPI] and how close the contest is expected to be.



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

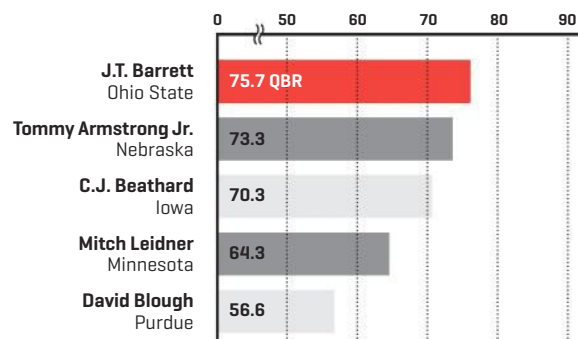
The Big Ten is the only Power 5 conference outside the top 50 in SOS.

54

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

The West is best—at least after Barrett, the Big Ten's only top-five returning passer, per QBR, who hails from the East.



J.T. Barrett

The Big Ten's most dangerous quarterback will command Columbus this fall. And he'll aim to take back the conference too.

1 Michigan

COACH Jim Harbaugh [2nd season]
10-3 (6-2 in bowl games)

The Jim Harbaugh effect is real. UM went from 5-7 under Brady Hoke in '14 to 10-3 last season, Harbaugh's first in Ann Arbor. In Year 2, it owns an edge in experience (15 returning starters) over fellow East powers Ohio State and Michigan State. Rejoice, Blue! Despite road trips to Columbus and East Lansing, Michigan has a strong shot at its first Big Ten title since '04. —Brian Bennett

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Jabrill Peppers

Sure, as mentioned a time or two, the stud soph moved from safety to linebacker this spring, but positions are just labels for Peppers. The modern-day Charles Woodson will once again be a factor on offense (two rushing TDs in 2015) and on kick returns (27.9 yards per return on eight kickoffs last year). As Michigan looks to maximize his freakish athletic gifts, don't be surprised if his versatility begets Heisman talk.

● X-FACTOR The freshmen

Harbaugh was busy in his first full recruiting cycle in Ann Arbor, signing ESPN's No. 6 overall class. The group includes the country's top overall prospect, DT Rashan Gary; ESPN 300 four-star RB Kareem Walker; and early enrollee Devin Bush Jr., who could start at linebacker from Day 1. The youngsters join a roster stocked with experienced talent, so if enough members of this class contribute right away, they could push the Wolverines over the top.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Houston transfer John O'Korn is the leader in the clubhouse to succeed a surprisingly solid Jake Rudock under center (81.3 QBR in 2015, No. 10 in the FBS), but he's a bit of a wild card. After throwing for 3,117 yards and 28 touchdowns in his AAC rookie-of-the-year campaign in 2013, he was benched five games—and eight interceptions—into 2014. Junior Shane Morris, who redshirted last year, and true freshman Brandon Peters (the No. 3 pro-style quarterback in the class of 2016) will push O'Korn throughout the summer.

THE PRESSER

● The Wolverines averaged almost half a yard more per play (from 5.3 to 5.7) in 2015 than they did the prior year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVED OFFENSIVE LINE?** "This coaching staff knows how to mask things. It's a lot more double-team, a lot more movement, a lot more point-of-attack doubles and down blocks. They're a team that embraces the 4- and 5-yard play, and not a lot of people in college football do that anymore." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Do-it-all Peppers and All-America CB Jourdan Lewis led the nation's stingiest secondary in 2015: 5.4 ypa, No. 1 in the FBS. Even after moving to strongside linebacker, Peppers should still factor in pass coverage.

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK PEPPERS? "I would go and make him cover. When he just plays in the run game and downhill, he's going to make plays. He can cover a little bit, but you can get some separation." —Big Ten offensive coach

● UM lost all three linebackers from '15, but the new guys will get help from a deep D-line. DT Ryan Glasgow will be fully healed from November shoulder surgery, and NT Bryan Mone is already back from a broken ankle in August. Add DEs Chris Wormley and Taco Charlton (12 total sacks) and UM might have the top DL anywhere. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FRONT SEVEN?** "I thought the weakest part of their D last year was their linebackers. But with the guys they have up front, if they're healthy, you can get away with whatever at linebacker." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (6-2)
BOWL GAME Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl vs. Florida, 41-7 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Jake Rudock: 3,017 yards
RUSHING De'Veon Smith: 753 yards
RECEIVING Jehu Chession: 764 yards
TACKLES Joe Bolden: 83
SACKS Chris Wormley: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Jeremy Clark: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	John O'Korn	Jr.	6-4 209
RB	De'Veon Smith	Sr.	5-11 228 ●
TE	Ian Bunting	So.	6-7 252
WR	Jehu Chession	Sr.	6-3 200 ●
WR	Amara Darboh	Sr.	6-0 184 ●
TE	Jake Butt	Sr.	6-6 250 ●
C	Mason Cole	Jr.	6-5 305 ●
RG	Kyle Kalis	Sr.	6-5 305 ●
LG	Ben Braden	Sr.	6-6 322 ●
RT	Erik Magnuson	Sr.	6-6 305 ●
LT	Grant Newsome	So.	6-7 300
K	Kenny Allen	Sr.	6-3 210 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Chris Wormley	Sr.	6-3 303 ●
DT	Ryan Glasgow	Sr.	6-4 300 ●
NT	Maurice Hurst	Jr.	6-2 282
DE	Taco Charlton	Sr.	6-5 265
ILB	Ben Gedeon	Sr.	6-3 248
ILB	Mike McCray	Jr.	6-4 240
SLB	Jabrill Peppers	So.	6-1 208 ●
CB	Jourdan Lewis	Sr.	5-10 175 ●
CB	Jeremy Clark	Sr.	6-4 210 ●
SS	Delano Hill	Sr.	6-0 212 ●
FS	Dymonte Thomas	Sr.	6-2 195
P	Kenny Allen	Sr.	6-3 210

6

Butt is just the sixth tight end in UM history to amass 1,000-plus career yards.



LON HORWEDEL/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10 ● FPI CHANCE MICHIGAN WINS

9/3 vs. Hawaii 99% ● 9/10 vs. Central Florida 97% ● 9/17 vs. Colorado 90%
9/24 vs. Penn State 77% ● 10/1 vs. Wisconsin 73% ● 10/8 @ Rutgers 85%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Illinois 93% ● 10/29 @ Michigan State 63% ● 11/5 vs. Maryland 92%
11/12 @ Iowa 65% ● 11/19 vs. Indiana 90% ● 11/26 @ Ohio State 44%

2 Ohio State

COACH Urban Meyer (5th season)
50-4 (3-1 in bowl games)

The Buckeyes' mass exodus of talent to the NFL makes them one of the most inexperienced squads in the country: eight returning starters in all. J.T. Barrett is back in Columbus, though, and talented if unproven blue chips abound. They'll be tested early—road-tripping to Norman, Oklahoma, in Week 3—and late, with an away date in East Lansing in November. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12-1 (7-1)
BOWL GAME BattleFrog Fiesta Bowl
vs. Notre Dame, 44-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cardale Jones: 1,460 yards
RUSHING Ezekiel Elliott: 1,821 yards
RECEIVING Michael Thomas: 781 yards
TACKLES Raekwon McMillan: 119
SACKS Tyquan Lewis: 8
INTERCEPTIONS Tyvis Powell: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB J.T. Barrett

Barrett returns to lead an offense that will feature new faces just about everywhere else. The good news for the Buckeyes, at least, is that the junior quarterback boasts a penchant for finding the end zone: He chipped in 11 touchdowns in the air and another 11 on the ground last year despite splitting reps with the since-departed Cardale Jones for much of the season.

X-FACTOR WR Torrance Gibson

Thanks to the Buckeyes' wealth of passers in 2015, the former five-star QB prospect redshirted last year, then made the full-time switch to wideout. And with the departure of last season's leading WR trio—Michael Thomas, Jalin Marshall and Braxton Miller [1,599 receiving yards combined]—Gibson will have ample opportunity to earn playing time this fall. The Florida native is an elite athlete, and Barrett will need a weapon to help him shoulder the load.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Ezekiel Elliott left large cleats to fill, and not just because he ran for 3,699 yards, 41 TDs and 12 multiple-TD games in his past two seasons. He was also valued as a blocker. And while he was the only RB show in town for two years, the Buckeyes look primed to employ a tailback-by-committee approach this fall. Fifth-year senior Br'onte Dunn and redshirt freshman Mike Weber will battle for the starting gig, but early enrollee Antonio Williams and hybrids Curtis Samuel and Dontre Wilson will merit attention too.

THE PRESSER

It's no secret that the Buckeyes will lean primarily on Barrett, but they'll hope for the 2014 version, when he posted an 87.1 QBR (No. 2 in the FBS). Last year, with the QB carousel spinning through October, he dipped to 75.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT BARRETT'S 2015 BACKSLIDE?** "J.T. is probably the prototype quarterback for what they want to do. But that guy was extremely accurate in 2014, and I didn't see that accuracy out of him last year." —Big Ten defensive coach

Urban Meyer's offenses operate best with a star at H-back—think Percy Harvin or Braxton Miller—and Samuel, a junior, might be next in line. He capitalized on limited action last year: Six of his 22 receptions went for 15-plus yards; five of his 17 rushes went for at least 10. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM SAMUEL?** "Every time we watched him on film, I thought he was a really good player who sure seemed to make a lot of plays. He has some of the versatility of Jalin Marshall and some of the positives of Ezekiel Elliott too." —Big Ten defensive coach

Like the offense, the D has one bona fide star: junior LB Raekwon McMillan. So who will replace TFL magnet Joey Bosa [16 last year] in the trenches? His sub-in from '15 is no slouch; soph DE Sam Hubbard racked up 6½ sacks last year—1½ more than Bosa. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT REPLACING BOSA?** "Hubbard is a future big-time NFL player. He was a true freshman last year, and he was great against Notre Dame in the bowl game." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	J.T. Barrett	Jr.	6-2 225 ●
RB	Mike Weber	RFr.	5-10 215
HB	Curtis Samuel	Jr.	5-11 196
WR	Corey Smith	Sr.	6-1 195
WR	Noah Brown	So.	6-2 222
TE	Marcus Baugh	Jr.	6-5 255
C	Pat Elflein	Sr.	6-3 300 ●
RG	Billy Price	Jr.	6-4 312 ●
LG	Michael Jordan	Fr.	6-7 316
RT	Isaiah Prince	So.	6-7 305
LT	Jamarco Jones	Jr.	6-5 306
K	Sean Nuernberger	Jr.	6-1 220 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Sam Hubbard	So.	6-5 265
DT	Tracy Sprinkle	Jr.	6-3 290
DT	Michael Hill	Jr.	6-3 295
DE	Tyquan Lewis	Jr.	6-4 260 ●
WLB	Dante Booker	Jr.	6-3 232
MLB	Raekwon McMillan	Jr.	6-2 240 ●
SLB	Chris Worley	Jr.	6-2 222
CB	Gareon Conley	Jr.	6-0 195 ●
CB	Marshon Lattimore	So.	6-0 195
S	Cam Burrows	Jr.	6-0 208
S	Malik Hooker	So.	6-2 205
P	Cameron Johnston	Sr.	5-11 195 ●



McMillan had double-digit tackles in three games in 2015 and nine tackles in three more.

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● FPI CHANCE OHIO STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Bowling Green 95% ● 9/10 vs. Tulsa 92% ● 9/17 @ Oklahoma 19%
9/24 BYE ● 10/1 vs. Rutgers 93% ● 10/8 vs. Indiana 89% ● 10/15 @ Wisconsin 52%
10/22 @ Penn State 57% ● 10/29 vs. Northwestern 86% ● 11/5 vs. Nebraska 69%
11/12 @ Maryland 84% ● 11/19 @ Michigan State 60% ● 11/26 vs. Michigan 56%

3 Penn State

COACH James Franklin [3rd season]
14-12 [1-1 in bowl games]

After back-to-back 7-6 campaigns, a seriously stagnant offense and a rocky offseason punctuated by two assistant coaches departing, James Franklin is starting to feel the heat in Happy Valley. He's banking on a new offensive approach and promising young talent to help the Nittany Lions compete in the loaded Big Ten East—but they still look like a tier below in 2016. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 [4-4]
BOWL GAME TaxSlayer Bowl
vs. Georgia, 24-17 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Christian Hackenberg: 2,525 yards
RUSHING Saquon Barkley: **1,076 yards**
RECEIVING Chris Godwin: **1,101 yards**
TACKLES Jason Cabinda: **100**
SACKS Carl Nassib: 15½
INTERCEPTIONS John Reid: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Saquon Barkley

As a true freshman in 2015, Barkley was a sensation on an otherwise abysmal offense, running for 1,076 yards and seven touchdowns. He put up those totals and averaged 5.9 ypc despite sitting two games with injury and getting just one carry and 1 yard in the opener at Temple. He was a home run threat too: His 15 runs of 20-plus yards last year was tied for sixth most in the Power 5.

● X-FACTOR New OC Joe Moorhead

Franklin went bold in hiring Moorhead, the former Fordham head coach, to revitalize a feeble offensive attack [133.9 rush ypg in 2015, No. 105 in the FBS; 214.5 pass ypg, No. 74; 23.2 ppg, No. 101]. The new offensive coordinator employs a no-huddle spread that aims to run at least 75 offensive snaps per game. Penn State averaged just 63.8 last season, fewest in the Big Ten.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Three-year starter Christian Hackenberg departed early for the NFL after two frustrating seasons behind an understocked line in Franklin's system. Hackenberg was durable, attempting all but 75 of PSU's 1,310 passes since '13, making his absence a gaping hole under center. Sophomore Trace McSorley led an inspired comeback attempt [two fourth-quarter TD passes] in last year's bowl loss vs. Georgia after Hackenberg got hurt, so he has a slight edge for the job despite just 13 regular-season attempts. Redshirt freshman Tommy Stevens and early enrollee Jake Zembiec are also fits in Moorhead's new system.

THE PRESSER

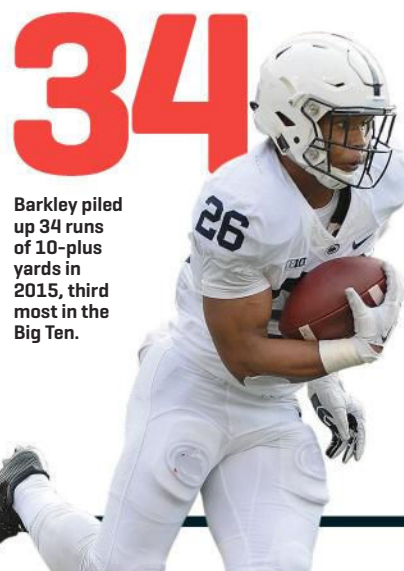
● The Nittany Lions return four starters on the offensive line in 2016, which ... might not be a good thing. The unit allowed 83 sacks the past two years combined, third most in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ANY IMPROVEMENT ALONG THE O-LINE?** "Maybe if they've got a quarterback who can move a hell of a lot better, [the problems] are not as obvious. Maybe spreading it out and moving it more laterally will help them, because I'm not sure they're going to move a whole lot of people up front." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Penn State is deep at wideout, led by junior Chris Godwin [12 catches of 30-plus yards in 2015, T4 in the Power 5]. But even with playmakers in the unit, the Lions managed just 20 TDs in the air last year, tied for 61st in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE WRs?** "Our big concern with them was always Hackenberg. Not to say we disrespected their receivers, but we didn't do anything different against them. We didn't have any real fear of their receivers." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Bob Shoop, the mastermind behind a PSU D that gave up 4.3 ypp in '14 [No. 3 in the FBS] and 4.8 ypp in '15 [No. 14], left for Tennessee. Gone too are QB terror Carl Nassib [four multi-sack games in '15] and all-Big Ten DTs Austin Johnson and Anthony Zettel. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEW-LOOK D?** "It will be interesting to see what they do differently schematically. They're just OK at 'backer, not what they have been. I'd much rather play them now after they lost those three guys." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Trace McSorley	So.	6-0 196
RB	Saquon Barkley	So.	5-11 222 ●
WR	DaeSean Hamilton	Jr.	6-1 206 ●
WR	Chris Godwin	Jr.	6-1 208 ●
WR	Saeed Blacknall	Jr.	6-2 210 ●
TE	Mike Gesicki	Jr.	6-6 255 ●
C	Brian Gaia	Sr.	6-3 304 ●
RG	Brendan Mahon	Jr.	6-4 318 ●
LG	Ryan Bates	RFr.	6-4 305
RT	Noah Beh	So.	6-6 292 ●
LT	Andrew Nelson	Jr.	6-6 302 ●
K	Tyler Davis	Jr.	5-11 186 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Evan Schwan	Sr.	6-6 255
NG	Parker Cothren	Jr.	6-4 302
DT	Kevin Givens	RFr.	6-1 280
DE	Garrett Sickels	Jr.	6-4 258 ●
WLB	Jason Cabinda	Jr.	6-1 245 ●
MLB	Nyeem Wartman-White	Sr.	6-1 243
SLB	Brandon Bell	Sr.	6-1 231 ●
CB	Grant Haley	Jr.	5-9 189 ●
CB	John Reid	So.	5-10 186
SS	Malik Golden	Sr.	6-0 205
FS	Marcus Allen	Jr.	6-2 209 ●
P	Daniel Pasquariello	Jr.	6-1 197 ●



CHRIS BERNACCHI/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.7 ● FPI CHANCE PENN STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Kent State **94%** ● 9/10 @ Pittsburgh **37%** ● 9/17 vs. Temple **79%**
9/24 @ Michigan **23%** ● 10/1 vs. Minnesota **81%** ● 10/8 vs. Maryland **82%**
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Ohio State **43%** ● 10/29 @ Purdue **67%** ● 11/5 vs. Iowa **59%**
11/12 @ Indiana **65%** ● 11/19 @ Rutgers **71%** ● 11/26 vs. Michigan State **58%**

4 Michigan State

COACH Mark Dantonio (10th season)
87-33 (4-5 in bowl games)

On the heels of an unprecedented run in East Lansing—MSU has reached double-digit wins in five of its past six seasons—the Spartans must now replace several cornerstone players, including their all-time winningest QB. An encore playoff appearance might be a reach, but they draw Michigan and Ohio State at home, so they'll contend (again) for Big Ten East bragging rights. —B.B.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DT Malik McDowell

Alongside Shilique Calhoun, the 6-foot-6, 280-pound McDowell hounded quarterbacks throughout 2015 to the tune of 4½ sacks and eight QB hurries. With Calhoun now preparing to play on Sundays, McDowell's continued production is vital to a team that relies on stopping the run first—the Spartans' defense has ranked in the top 25 in ypc allowed every year since '11. His two forced fumbles and one pick returned for a TD were a bonus.

● X-FACTOR CB Vayante Copeland

The sophomore drew favorable comparisons to former Spartan Darqueze Dennard (MSU's first-ever DB to take home the Jim Thorpe Award) last summer. He looked ready to take the reins as the Spartans' next lockdown corner in Week 1 (2 TFLs, 1 INT) but was lost for the season after fracturing a vertebra in his neck in Week 2. If Copeland is 100 percent healthy this fall, he'll be instrumental in reinstituting Sparty's "No Fly Zone." Two years after allowing 5.2 ypa (No. 2 in the FBS), Michigan State gave up two more yards per attempt in 2015 (No. 78).

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Mainstay Connor Cook (39 starts in three years) is gone, so coach Mark Dantonio will decide between senior Tyler O'Connor and junior Damion Terry (80 combined career pass attempts). They are both more mobile than their predecessor (116 yards rushing combined in '15, compared with Cook's 56), but O'Connor, with a pro style that Dantonio favors, might hold the edge.

THE PRESSER

● The Spartans platooned three running backs who ran for 500-plus yards apiece in 2015, headlined by sophomore LJ Scott, who barreled into the end zone to cap a Big Ten title-winning 22-play, 82-yard drive over Iowa. Scott was also one of just 13 Power 5 backs to score at least two rushing TDs in four-plus games last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SCOTT'S STRENGTHS?** "He's not a speed guy [4.6-4.7 40 range] who is going to beat you east and west, but he fits their offense. ... That big, downhill, bruiser type of guy." —Big Ten defensive coach

● MSU QBs saw pressure on just 23.4 percent of dropbacks, No. 17 in the Power 5, thanks to an unyielding O-line. While three starters are gone (including All-Americans Jack Allen and Jack Conklin), the Spartans had to use seven different combinations up front in '15 due to injury, so the backups have experience. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LINE'S FORECAST?** "Michigan State was about the best offensive line that we saw last year. They mauled you. I would expect that they'll have a good line, I'm just not sure it will be a great one like they had without those two guys." —Big Ten defensive coach

● McDowell shined in some of Sparty's biggest wins in '15, especially as a force in key goal-line stops vs. Oregon and at Michigan. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO HANDLE McDOWELL?** "It's so unusual for an inside guy to have that size and speed. Double-teaming him is the way to go. He is a problem one-on-one." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12-2 (7-1)

BOWL GAME Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic (CFP semifinal) vs. Alabama, 38-0 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Connor Cook: 3,131 yards

RUSHING LJ Scott: 699 yards

RECEIVING Aaron Burbridge: 1,258 yards

TACKLES Riley Bullough: 106

SACKS Shilique Calhoun: 10½

INTERCEPTIONS Montae Nicholson: 3

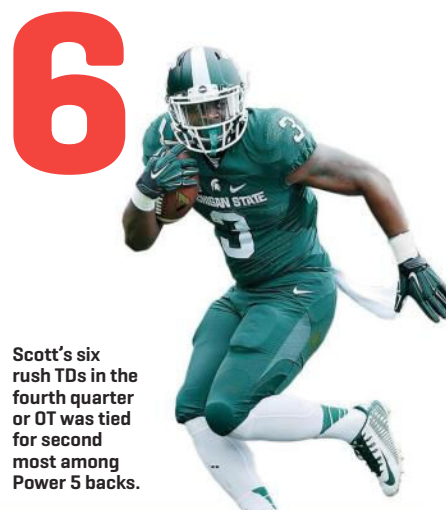
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Tyler O'Connor	Sr. 6-3 222
RB	LJ Scott	So. 6-0 238 ●
WR	Felton Davis III	So. 6-4 198
WR	Donnie Corley	Fr. 6-3 185
WR	R.J. Shelton	Sr. 5-11 205
TE	Josiah Price	Sr. 6-4 260 ●
C	Brian Allen	Jr. 6-2 303 ●
RG	David Beedle	So. 6-5 310
LG	Benny McGowan	Sr. 6-3 327
RT	Kodi Kieler	Sr. 6-6 310 ●
LT	Dennis Finley	Jr. 6-6 282
K	Michael Geiger	Sr. 5-8 183 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Demetrius Cooper	Jr. 6-5 252
NT	Malik McDowell	Jr. 6-6 280 ●
DT	Damon Knox	Sr. 6-5 270
DE	Josh King	Fr. 6-6 230
SLB	Chris Frey	Jr. 6-2 222
MLB	Riley Bullough	Sr. 6-2 230 ●
OLB	Jon Reschke	Jr. 6-2 228 ●
CB	Vayante Copeland	So. 6-0 197
CB	Darian Hicks	Sr. 5-10 180 ●
SS	Montae Nicholson	Jr. 6-2 220 ●
FS	Demetrius Cox	Sr. 6-1 198 ●
P	Jake Hartbarger	So. 6-4 207 ●



Scott's six rush TDs in the fourth quarter or OT was tied for second most among Power 5 backs.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0 ● FPI CHANCE MICHIGAN STATE WINS

9/2 vs. Furman **99%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** @ Notre Dame **29%**
9/24 vs. Wisconsin **54%** ● **10/1** @ Indiana **67%** ● **10/8** vs. BYU **72%** ● **10/15** vs. Northwestern **72%**
10/22 @ Maryland **71%** ● **10/29** vs. Michigan **37%** ● **11/5** @ Illinois **71%**
11/12 vs. Rutgers **84%** ● **11/19** vs. Ohio State **40%** ● **11/26** @ Penn State **42%**

5 Indiana

COACH Kevin Wilson [6th season]
20-41 [0-1 in bowl games]

The long Bloomington nightmare is over. After seven straight seasons without a bowl (and a 13-year drought before a reprieve in '07), the Hoosiers finally made the postseason last year. Is a second straight bowl berth in store? The bad news: IU is still trying to cobble together a respectable D for the first time in years. The good: Its 2016 noncon foes averaged 3.7 wins last year. —B.B.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON WR Simmie Cobbs Jr.

The lanky 6-foot-4 junior finished last season strong [four 100-plus-yard games in his final seven] to become just the sixth Hoosiers wideout to eclipse the 1,000-yard mark. With strong-armed juco transfer Richard Lagow taking the reins under center, Cobbs' ability to stretch the field [17.3 ypc, No. 22 in the Power 5] should help smooth the transition.

● X-FACTOR New DC Tom Allen

Here's how dire Indiana's defensive straits are: Allen is the fifth defensive coordinator [or co-coordinator] under sixth-year head coach Kevin Wilson. Since 2004, the Hoosiers rank 116th in the FBS in yards allowed. Holding to tradition, Indiana was one of just 10 FBS programs in 2015 to surrender 500-plus ypg, as opposing offenses scored at will [31 two-minute TD drives, second most in the Power 5]. If Allen can upgrade the unit to merely serviceable, the Hoosiers could have another bowl-eligible year in their sights. Here's the challenge: He brings an Ole Miss-like 4-2-5 scheme to Bloomington ... minus the Ole Miss-like talent.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive line

Moving from a three- to a four-man front will be challenging, especially after the loss of four of the top five D-linemen. With three starts in 2015, senior Ralph Green III has the most experience and might be penciled in as one DT. Junior Robert McCray III will also compete for time inside with Nate Hoff, who had only four tackles as a sophomore after making 29 as a freshman.

THE PRESSER

● Indiana has quietly churned out a physical running attack of late, with 2,000-yard rusher Tevin Coleman in 2014 and a pair of 1,000-yard backs in 2015 [Jordan Howard and Devine Redding]. Howard departs, but Redding, a junior, returns to Bloomington, where he should build on his 31 runs of 10-plus yards from last year [T25 among Power 5 rushers].

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE GROUND GAME HAS IMPROVED? "The way they run their split-zone play and how they utilize their backs is absolutely incredible. It was way better than anybody else, and they ran it with such precision and tremendous angles." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Even with IU's runners, the Hoosiers' hallmark and primary advantage in league play has been pace. Last year they averaged 81 snaps per game, eight more than the next-busiest Big Ten team, Nebraska. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT INDIANA'S TEMPO?** "They're unique in our league in that they're going to try to get 100 plays in a game and just literally outscore you." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Indiana gave up more points [37.6 ppg] than all but 11 FBS programs last year. Allen's 4-2-5 defense aims to stanch that bleeding, especially in the air, where the Hoosiers allowed 32 TDs [fourth most in the nation]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE SWITCH TO A 4-2-5 MAY HELP?** "They gave up a lot of big plays in their secondary. Their thing may be: 'Can people get ready for the 4-2-5 in a week?' And maybe that will give them an edge." —Big Ten offensive coach

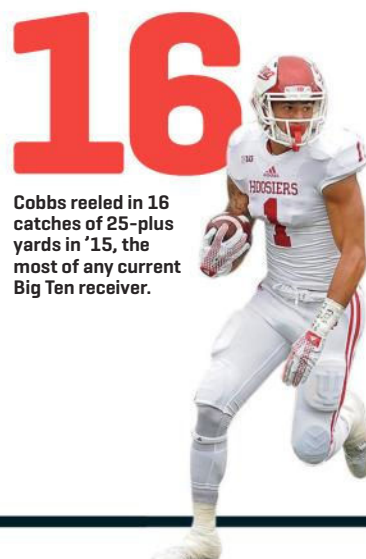
LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 [2-6]
BOWL GAME New Era Pinstripe Bowl vs. Duke, 44-41 L [OT]
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Nate Sudfeld: 3,573 yards
RUSHING Jordan Howard: 1,213 yards
RECEIVING Simmie Cobbs Jr.: 1,035 yards
TACKLES Marcus Oliver: 112
SACKS Nick Mangieri: 9½
INTERCEPTIONS Jonathan Crawford: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Richard Lagow	Jr.	6-6 240
RB	Devine Redding	Jr.	5-10 205
WR	Ricky Jones	Sr.	5-10 184 ●
WR	Simmie Cobbs Jr.	Jr.	6-4 220 ●
WR	Mitchell Paige	Sr.	5-7 175 ●
TE	Danny Friend	Jr.	6-5 260
C	Wes Rogers	Sr.	6-4 305
RG	Dan Feeney	Sr.	6-4 310 ●
LG	Wes Martin	So.	6-3 310 ●
RT	Dimitric Camiel	Sr.	6-7 310 ●
LT	Brandon Knight	So.	6-5 290
K	Griffin Oakes	Jr.	5-10 200 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Jacob Robinson	So.	6-4 277
DT	Nate Hoff	Jr.	6-2 302
DT	Robert McCray III	Jr.	6-2 274
DE	Greg Gooch	Jr.	6-2 257
WLB	Marcus Oliver	Jr.	6-1 236 ●
MLB	Tegray Scates	Jr.	6-0 227 ●
NB	Will Dawkins	So.	5-11 202 ●
CB	Rashard Fant	Jr.	5-10 174 ●
CB	Tyler Green	So.	6-3 193 ●
SS	Jonathan Crawford	So.	6-2 194 ●
FS	Chase Dutra	Jr.	6-1 199 ●
P	Joseph Gedeon	So.	6-3 193



SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.4 ● FPI CHANCE INDIANA WINS

9/1 @ Florida International **78%** ● 9/10 vs. Ball State **87%** ● 9/17 BYE ● 9/24 vs. Wake Forest **59%**
10/1 vs. Michigan State **34%** ● 10/8 @ Ohio State **11%** ● 10/15 vs. Nebraska **25%**
10/22 @ Northwestern **36%** ● 10/29 vs. Maryland **65%** ● 11/5 @ Rutgers **43%**
11/12 vs. Penn State **35%** ● 11/19 @ Michigan **10%** ● 11/26 vs. Purdue **59%**

6 Maryland

COACH D.J. Durkin [1st season]

After losing 11 of its past 13 games vs. FBS foes, Maryland is starting over with former Michigan defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin at the helm. He inherits a pair of QBs who were historically bad in 2015, so even with a friendly noncon lineup, a bowl looks out of reach. Simply put, Durkin needs more than one year to recruit the fertile DMV to turn the Terrapins around. —B.B.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON CB William Likely

He's only 5-foot-7, but Likely is a big play waiting to happen. The Big Ten returner of the year in 2015, he led the nation in combined return yards [1,197], averaged 17.7 yards per punt return and brought two punts and one kickoff back for TDs. On a team lacking explosiveness [14 team receptions of 25-plus yards in 2015, T121 in the FBS], Likely provided a welcome burst. Oh, and he's also the team's star defender and lone defensive back returning to the Terps' secondary.

● X-FACTOR The Jacobs brothers

Wide receivers Lavern and Taivon Jacobs have speed and skill, but the Terps are still awaiting the duo's breakout. Lavern, a senior, was suspended for 2014 for violating the student code of conduct; Taivon, a junior, missed the same season with a knee injury. Last year Maryland's QBs struggled to get the ball to anyone but opposing defenders [29 INTs, six more than any other FBS team]. The QBs must find the Jacobsses more often for the new up-tempo attack to take flight in '16.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

The Terps' pass game was so bad [37.6 QBR, No. 106 in the FBS] that Maryland all but abandoned it. So those aforementioned 29 picks? Even more mind-boggling considering this wasn't a high-volume passing team [387 attempts, No. 82]. Seniors Perry Hills [eight starts] and Caleb Rowe [four] must improve to ward off redshirt freshman Gage Shaffer and incoming freshman Tyrrell Pigrome. Otherwise, this spot breaks wide open.

THE PRESSER

● OC Walt Bell arrives from Arkansas State, where he ran a fast-paced system heavy on the screen game, O-line shifts and outside runs with pulling linemen. The Red Wolves rang up 40.0 ppg in '15 [No. 12 in the FBS], a world away from the Terps' 24.7 [T95].

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE UP-TEMPO WILL TRANSLATE? "I don't think they can hold up up front because they're not going to have the linemen. When you can't block 'em, the best thing you can do is slow 'em down with some screens and QB runs." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Hills was effective on the ground last year [three games of 100-plus yards rushing], but his 40.2 QBR [No. 108 in the FBS], 50 percent completion rate [No. 115] and 0.62 TD-INT rate [T117] were killers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HILLS?** "He runs well enough that we couldn't catch him. I don't know that he's going to stand in there and beat you throwing seven cuts. But this offense might fit him a little bit." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Likely is a star [he earned a first-team All-Big Ten nod in '14 with 6 INTs], and opposing QBs most often avoid throwing his way. But while he amassed 11 pass breakups last year, he failed to grab a pick. His secondary got burned in 2015, giving up 50 receptions of 20-plus yards [T104 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LIKELY'S VULNERABILITY?** "He's a really good athlete, but as far as a cover corner, we made a lot of big plays going over the top of him. Size does give him a problem." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [1-7]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Perry Hills: **1,001 yards**

RUSHING Brandon Ross: 958 yards

RECEIVING Lavern Jacobs: **425 yards**

TACKLES Jermaine Carter Jr.: **103**

SACKS Yannick Ngakoue: 13½

INTERCEPTIONS Sean Davis: 3

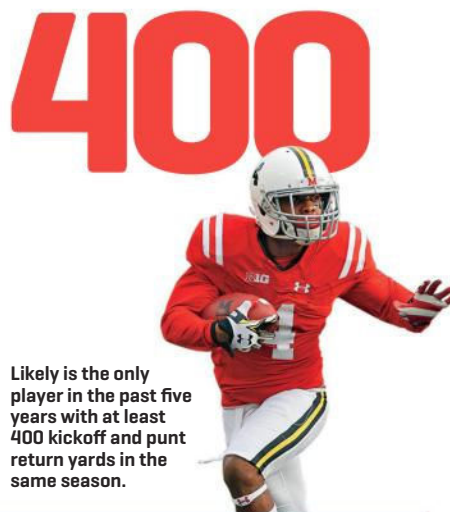
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Perry Hills	Sr. 6-2 210 ●
RB	Wes Brown	Sr. 6-0 210
WR	D.J. Moore	So. 5-11 205 ●
WR	Lavern Jacobs	Sr. 5-11 185 ●
WR	Taivon Jacobs	Jr. 5-9 165 ●
TE	Avery Edwards	So. 6-4 245 ●
C	Brendan Moore	So. 6-3 295
RG	Damian Prince	So. 6-3 325 ●
LG	Quarvez Boulware	RFr. 6-2 304
RT	Derwin Gray	So. 6-5 328
LT	Michael Dunn	Sr. 6-5 312 ●
K	Adam Greene	Jr. 5-11 185

DEFENSE

DE	Roman Braglio	Sr. 6-2 262 ●
DT	David Shaw	So. 6-4 308
DT	Azubuike Ukandu	Sr. 6-0 306 ●
DE	Jesse Aniebonam	Jr. 6-3 260
WLB	Shane Cockerille	Jr. 6-2 235 ●
MLB	Jermaine Carter Jr.	Jr. 6-0 240 ●
SLB	Melvin Keihn	So. 6-1 211
CB	William Likely	Sr. 5-7 175 ●
CB	Alvin Hill	Sr. 6-0 200
SS	Denzel Conyers	Sr. 6-3 216
FS	Josh Woods	Jr. 6-1 202
P	Wade Lees	Fr. 6-2 204 ●



Likely is the only player in the past five years with at least 400 kickoff and punt return yards in the same season.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.3 ● FPI CHANCE MARYLAND WINS

9/3 vs. Howard **99%** ● **9/9** @ Florida International **73%** ● **9/17** @ Central Florida **66%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** vs. Purdue **59%** ● **10/8** @ Penn State **18%** ● **10/15** vs. Minnesota **55%**
10/22 vs. Michigan State **29%** ● **10/29** @ Indiana **36%** ● **11/5** @ Michigan **8%**
11/12 vs. Ohio State **16%** ● **11/19** @ Nebraska **12%** ● **11/26** vs. Rutgers **58%**

7 Rutgers

COACH Chris Ash [1st season]

A 2015 disaster—one conference victory (lowly Indiana) and four wins total (lowlier Norfolk State, Kansas and Army)—begat a housecleaning in Piscataway. Former Ohio State DC Chris Ash was brought in to clean up the mess, but he isn't left with much. And with the Big Ten moving to a nine-game conference slate in '16, another basement-dwelling season looks likely. —B.B.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DT Darius Hamilton

The captain—and 2014 team defensive MVP when he had 11½ TFLs and six sacks—was shut down for the season in Week 3 last year after a lingering knee injury failed to heal. Not coincidentally, Rutgers' run defense fell off a cliff in conference play: a Big Ten—worst 5.7 ypc; four games allowing 250-plus rush yards, tied for seventh worst in the Power 5; and a 64.2 percent third-down conversion rate on runs, third worst in the FBS. Hamilton will help stabilize the defensive front, especially if the senior returns to 2014 form.

● X-FACTOR DE Kemoko Turay

The freakishly athletic pass rusher emerged as a redshirt freshman in 2014, making 7½ sacks and blocking three kicks, including one to beat Michigan. Then he all but disappeared in '15. While coping with nagging injuries, Turay chipped in just nine tackles and two sacks in his 11 game appearances. The new staff's ability to harness his 2014-level play will be crucial for a team that sorely missed a pass rush last year. Rutgers managed only 14 sacks [T120 in the FBS], fewer than the nation's leading sack artist, Penn State's Carl Nassib, totaled on his own [15½].

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Junior Chris Laviano beat out LSU transfer Hayden Rettig last year but was unspectacular: 16 TDs to 12 INTs. A new staff brings fresh competition. While Rettig boasts the bigger arm, Rutgers' offensive shift from pro-style to power spread [think Ohio State] might favor the slightly more mobile Laviano.

THE PRESSER

● Ash tapped Drew Mehringer, a Tom Herman disciple, to run the aforementioned power spread, which emphasizes inside zone runs. He inherits a pair of 650-plus-yard RBs in juniors Robert Martin and Josh Hicks, but can the O-line pave the way? Knights runners averaged 2.0 yards before contact, 11th in the Big Ten. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE POWER SPREAD?** "Coach Herman's system—whether at Rice, Iowa State, Ohio State or Houston—has proven to be solid. They have running backs that can all play, but I'd worry about that O-line. We imposed our will a little bit against them." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Laviano is as close to a dual threat as the Rutgers roster gets, but thanks to 24 sacks, he still finished 2015 with minus-38 rushing yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAVIANO'S DOWNSIDE?** "He either sees the rush or doesn't see it at all. There was no in-between. He struggled with recognition of what was coming at him ... so we knew he was going to get whacked a lot." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Ash's defensive scheme relies on playing press man coverage with long corners, which Rutgers looks to have in 6-foot-1 sophs Isaiah Wharton and Blessuan Austin. They're young but combined for 22 starts and 14 passes broken up in '15. The key will be to recruit similar talent in the future. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PERSONNEL FITS?** "I don't see his defense being much different than it was at Ohio State, Arkansas and Wisconsin. But he doesn't have an East Coast staff and he's not an East Coast guy." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 [1-7]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Chris Laviano: 2,247 yards

RUSHING Robert Martin: 763 yards

RECEIVING Leonte Carroo: 809 yards

TACKLES Steve Longa: 117

SACKS Quanzell Lambert: 2½

INTERCEPTIONS Anthony Cioffi: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Chris Laviano	Jr. 6-2 210 ●
RB	Robert Martin	Jr. 5-11 205 ●
WR	Janarion Grant	Sr. 5-10 176 ●
WR	Carlton Agudosi	Sr. 6-6 220
WR	Andre Patton	Sr. 6-3 205 ●
TE	Nick Arcidiacono	Sr. 6-4 240 ●
C	Derrick Nelson	Sr. 6-3 295 ●
RG	Chris Muller	Sr. 6-6 319 ●
LG	Dorian Miller	Jr. 6-2 292 ●
RT	J.J. Denman	Sr. 6-5 305 ●
LT	Tariq Cole	So. 6-6 314
K	David Bonagura	Jr. 6-0 245

DEFENSE

DE	Quanzell Lambert	Sr. 6-1 260 ●
DT	Darius Hamilton	Sr. 6-3 283
DT	Sebastian Joseph	Jr. 6-4 295 ●
DE	Julian Pinnix-Odrick	Sr. 6-5 275 ●
WLB	Deonte Roberts	So. 6-1 234
MLB	Solomon Manning	Fr. 6-1 222
SLB	Najee Clayton	So. 6-1 217
CB	Isaiah Wharton	So. 6-1 204 ●
CB	Blessuan Austin	So. 6-1 195 ●
SS	Anthony Cioffi	Sr. 6-0 200 ●
FS	Saquan Hampton	So. 6-1 199 ●
P	Michael Cintron	So. 6-3 219

6



Grant was one of six players in the past 10 years to return a kick-off and a punt for a TD in the same game.

RICH SCHULTZ/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.8 ● FPI CHANCE RUTGERS WINS

9/3 @ Washington 7% ● 9/10 vs. Howard 99% ● 9/17 vs. New Mexico 79%
 9/24 vs. Iowa 33% ● 10/1 @ Ohio State 8% ● 10/8 vs. Michigan 15%
 10/15 vs. Illinois 59% ● 10/22 @ Minnesota 35% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 vs. Indiana 57%
 11/12 @ Michigan State 16% ● 11/19 vs. Penn State 29% ● 11/26 @ Maryland 42%

1 Nebraska

COACH Mike Riley (2nd season)
6-7 (1-0 in bowl games)

The ball is bound to bounce their way sooner or later, right? Six of their seven losses came by eight points or fewer, so the tested Huskers (15 returning starters) could vie again for nine wins—a benchmark they reached or surpassed for seven straight years before 2015. Nebraska hosts Oregon early, but a forgiving Big Ten West slate should help its cause. —Mitch Sherman

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON QB Tommy Armstrong Jr.** The three-year starter is a weapon on the ground—he has run for 50-plus yards 11 times in his career—but can be a liability through the air. Armstrong threw a career-high 16 INTs last year, bolstered by OC Danny Langsdorf's tendency to overextend his QB's range. The game plan in '16? Return to the 2015 season finale's formula vs. UCLA, when he attempted 19 passes [compared with his 33.5 season average] but completed 63.2 percent of those throws (2015 average: 55.2).

● **X-FACTOR WR De'Mornay Pierson-El** Chalk up last season to a lost year for the speedy junior. Sidelined with foot and knee injuries, he appeared in just five games, managing 19 touches all fall. But before he was a nonfactor, Pierson-El flashed his game-breaking ability as a freshman in '14, totaling 596 punt-return yards—164 more than any other team nationally. If he returns to the roster in good health, Nebraska's already robust wideout group [each of its top four WRs from last year returns] gets an instant infusion.

● **POSITION BATTLE Defensive tackle** The heart of the D-line, which helped the Huskers hold opponents to 109.8 rush ypg in 2015 (No. 9 in the FBS), sustained major blows: Maliek Collins and Vincent Valentine declared early for the draft, and senior Greg McMullen, a regular on the edge last year (nine starts at DE, four at DT), ended his career to focus on grad school. Senior Kevin Maurice has experience, but the Huskers could go young with twin redshirt freshmen Carlos and Khalil Davis.

THE PRESSER

● Armstrong grabs headlines, but Nebraska's receiving corps, led by senior trio Jordan Westerkamp, Brandon Reilly and Alonzo Moore (2,067 combined yards in '15), form the offense's most reliable unit. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO DEFEND THE PASS?** "Our thought process was, 'We're going to have to make Tommy throw into tight spaces as opposed to giving him wide-open spaces.' He likes to scramble, so we had to make sure, especially in zone coverages, that we find those receivers." —Big Ten defensive coach

● The Huskers lost by double digits just once last year, laying an egg at Purdue 55-45. Not coincidentally, it was the one game Armstrong sat out (foot injury). The senior QB has upped his QBR each year: 60.9 in '13, 64.3 in '14 and 73.3 in '15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH NEBRASKA RELIES ON ARMSTRONG?** "During pregame warm-ups, I thought Nebraska had the biggest separation between their starting QB and their backups of any team in the conference. You looked at the backups and thought, 'Boy, I wish we were playing those guys.'" —Big Ten defensive coach

● Opposing quarterbacks worked the Huskers in 2015 (59.8 defensive QBR, No. 92 in the FBS). And last year's much-maligned secondary (12.9 ypc allowed, No. 89) will be tested again with departures on the D-line. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D IN '16?** "Big holes to fill up front, but Nebraska doesn't lack for athletes on the line. They've got younger guys with size who can run." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (3-5)
BOWL GAME Foster Farms Bowl
vs. UCLA, 37-29 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Tommy Armstrong Jr.: 3,030 yards
RUSHING Terrell Newby: 765 yards
RECEIVING Jordan Westerkamp: 918 yards
TACKLES Nate Gerry: 79
SACKS Freedom Akinmoladun: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS Nate Gerry: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Tommy Armstrong Jr.	Sr.	6-1 220 ●
RB	Terrell Newby	Sr.	5-10 200 ●
WR	Brandon Reilly	Sr.	6-2 200 ●
WR	Jordan Westerkamp	Sr.	6-0 200 ●
WR	Alonzo Moore	Sr.	6-2 195 ●
TE	Cethan Carter	Sr.	6-4 240 ●
C	Dylan Utter	Sr.	6-1 295 ●
RG	Tanner Farmer	So.	6-4 294 ●
LG	Jerald Foster	So.	6-3 310 ●
RT	David Knevel	Jr.	6-9 315 ●
LT	Nick Gates	So.	6-5 300 ●
K	Draw Brown	Jr.	5-11 195 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Ross Dzuris	Sr.	6-3 255 ●
DT	Carlos Davis	RFr.	6-2 295 ●
DT	Kevin Maurice	Sr.	6-3 300 ●
DE	Freedom Akinmoladun	So.	6-4 255 ●
WLB	Marcus Newby	Jr.	6-1 235 ●
MLB	Josh Banderas	Sr.	6-3 240 ●
SLB	Dedrick Young	So.	6-1 220 ●
CB	Joshua Kalu	Jr.	6-1 190 ●
CB	Chris Jones	Jr.	6-0 185 ●
SS	Aaron Williams	So.	5-11 185 ●
FS	Nate Gerry	Sr.	6-2 210 ●
P	Sam Foltz	Sr.	6-2 205 ●



Armstrong had 12 INTs on passes thrown 10-plus yards, third most among Power 5 QBs.

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● FPI CHANCE NEBRASKA WINS

9/3 vs. Fresno State 96% ● 9/10 vs. Wyoming 96% ● 9/17 vs. Oregon 64%
9/24 @ Northwestern 68% ● 10/1 vs. Illinois 86% ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 @ Indiana 75%
10/22 vs. Purdue 85% ● 10/29 @ Wisconsin 45% ● 11/5 @ Ohio State 31%
11/12 vs. Minnesota 85% ● 11/19 vs. Maryland 88% ● 11/25 @ Iowa 53%

2 Wisconsin

COACH Paul Chryst [2nd season]
10-3 [1-0 in bowl games]

In his 2015 homecoming, Paul Chryst led the Badgers to 10 wins but lost the inside track to a West crown after an early loss to Iowa at Camp Randall. To steer the Badgers back to Indianapolis, he'll bank on (surprise!) a reliable ground game—on both sides of the ball. Wisconsin returns its star ball carrier and the lion's share of its front seven. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 [6-2]
BOWL GAME National Funding Holiday Bowl vs. USC, 23-21 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Joel Stave: 2,687 yards
RUSHING **Dare Ogunbowale: 819 yards**
RECEIVING Alex Erickson: 978 yards
TACKLES **T.J. Edwards: 84**
SACKS Joe Schobert: 9½
INTERCEPTIONS Tanner McEvoy: 6

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON RB Corey Clement**
Clement returns to Madison after a forgettable year: He played just four games (and had just one 100-yard outing) because of an ankle injury and sports hernia surgery. His fill-ins, senior Dare Ogunbowale and soph Taiwan Deal, were dependable (13 rush TDs combined), but the Badgers failed to put up 2,000 rush yards for the first time since '04. Clement managed to rack up 949 yards and nine TDs as the backup behind Melvin Gordon two years ago, so the Badgers will welcome a return to a more Wisconsin-like ground game this fall.

● **X-FACTOR LB Vince Biegel**
The Badgers regularly field elite linebacking corps, but losing reigning Big Ten LB of the year Joe Schobert, who forced five fumbles (T2 in the FBS) and 19½ TFLs (T11), leaves a playmaking hole. The Badgers will need Biegel, a senior with 15½ sacks over the past two seasons, to step into the role of top playmaker to help avoid a drop-off for the nation's fourth-best run D last year (95.4 ypg).

● **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Senior Bart Houston emerged in Week 8 when he replaced Joel Stave against Illinois and threw for 232 yards and two TDs. His experience may make him better suited to see the Badgers through a tough slate [Michigan, Michigan State and Ohio State from the East], but redshirt frosh Alex Hornibrook looks to be the long-term answer. A Pitt decommit and early enrollee in '15, he has a rocket arm and a strong bond with Chryst, who had recruited him since his junior year at Malvern [Pa.] Prep.

THE PRESSER

● Playing most of the season without Clement sapped Wisconsin's rush attack, which gained 150.3 ypg last year, a 50 percent drop from 2014. But an O-line that dealt with experience and depth woes a year ago returns all but one man, including senior C Dan Voltz, who ended 2015 sidelined by a knee injury. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT REVIVING THE RUN?** "The thing that concerns me most with Wisconsin and the way Paul operates is the O-line. Their system works. A year or two from now, I think people will say that he has done a good job of getting those guys to be Wisconsin again." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Coordinator Dave Aranda left for LSU, but the legacy of his 3-4 D—and six of last year's starters who made it tick—remains. New DC Justin Wilcox (USC) inherits a unit that ranks No. 1 in the FBS since '13 in ypg (289.4, one of three teams below 300) and No. 2 in ppg (17.0). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TRANSITION TO WILCOX?** "Aranda's stuff, they didn't give you a bunch of crazy, different looks. They lined up and played and had some good pressures off their base stuff. Justin's the same." —Big Ten offensive coach

● Five of Wisconsin's top six tacklers in '15 were linebackers. Four of them (256 tackles, 30½ TFLs combined) are back. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S CALLING CARD FOR '16?** "They haven't had a dominant guy up front, maybe going back to J.J. Watt. But they've got such good linebackers, they make up for it. Biegel stands out. He's the next name everyone is going to know." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Bart Houston	Sr.	6-4 228
RB	Corey Clement	Sr.	5-11 217 ●
TE	Troy Fumagalli	Jr.	6-6 251
WR	Robert Wheelwright	Sr.	6-3 202 ●
WR	Jazz Peavy	Jr.	6-0 182
TE	Eric Steffes	Sr.	6-5 259
C	Dan Voltz	Sr.	6-3 301 ●
RG	Beau Benzschawel	So.	6-6 309 ●
LG	Michael Deiter	So.	6-6 318 ●
RT	Jacob Maxwell	So.	6-6 319 ●
LT	Ryan Ramczyk	Jr.	6-6 308
K	Rafael Gaglianone	Jr.	5-11 230 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Conor Sheehy	Jr.	6-4 290 ●
NT	Olive Sagapolu	So.	6-2 332
DE	Chikwe Obasiah	Jr.	6-3 268 ●
OLB	Vince Biegel	Sr.	6-4 244 ●
ILB	T.J. Edwards	So.	6-1 238 ●
ILB	Jack Cichy	Jr.	6-2 220 ●
OLB	T.J. Watt	Jr.	6-5 247
CB	Derrick Tindal	Jr.	5-11 174
CB	Sojourn Shelton	Sr.	5-9 173 ●
SS	D'Cota Dixon	Jr.	5-10 206
FS	Leo Musso	Sr.	5-10 186
P	Anthony Lotti	Fr.	6-1 190

6.6 Since 2013, Clement's 6.6 ypc ranks eighth among Power 5 backs (minimum 250 carries).



MIKE MCCINNIS/BETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.5 ● FPI CHANCE WISCONSIN WINS

9/3 vs. LSU [Green Bay, Wis.] **15%** ● 9/10 vs. Akron **96%** ● 9/17 vs. Georgia State **95%**
9/24 @ Michigan State **46%** ● 10/1 @ Michigan **27%** ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 vs. Ohio State **48%**
10/22 @ Iowa **50%** ● 10/29 vs. Nebraska **55%** ● 11/5 @ Northwestern **65%** ● 11/12 vs. Illinois **85%**
11/19 @ Purdue **72%** ● 11/26 vs. Minnesota **82%**

3 Iowa

COACH Kirk Ferentz [18th season]
127-87 [6-7 in bowl games]

The Hawkeyes rolled to the first 12-win season in school history last year, and though their campaign ended in two straight losses, they should vie for Big Ten West top billing again. The bulk of last year's firepower returns to Iowa City, including the Hawkeyes' most critical playmakers: steady-handed QB C.J. Beathard and Thorpe Award winner DB Desmond King. —M.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB C.J. Beathard

Beathard's consistency [70.3 QBR last year, No. 31 in the FBS] and ability to stay out of trouble [5 INTs, T11] begat a consistent, mostly trouble-free Iowa: The Hawkeyes didn't trail in the fourth quarter until their 13th game. And though the senior QB's knack for making plays with his legs [13 runs of 10-plus yards] confounded defenders, it also wore him down—Beathard played through hip and groin injuries for almost the entire year. Keeping him on the field is priority No. 1 [and 2, 3, 4 ...] because Iowa is a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten West squad without Beathard. With him? It's among the favorites to repeat.

● X-FACTOR WR Matt VandeBerg

The South Dakota product is not the fastest or strongest Big Ten wide receiver—just 50.8 percent of his catches went for a first down or TD last year [league average: 61.1]. But he is a reliable target for Beathard, especially over the middle, with a team-high 65 grabs in 2015. Still, the Hawkeyes mustered just 20 catches of 25-plus yards last year [T96 in the FBS], so a downfield threat still eludes Iowa.

● POSITION BATTLE Outside linebacker

The Hawkeyes' stout linebackers helped bottle up big runs last year [only 11 rushes of 20-plus yards allowed, T8 in the Power 5]. Iowa's second-leading tackler, weakside LB Cole Fisher, departs, but juniors Ben Niemann and Bo Bower return to duke it out at strong-side. Niemann started all 14 games last year, but Bower contributed [15 tackles] and also brings starting experience [13 games in '14].

THE PRESSER

● The Hawkeyes broke in new starting offensive tackles last year and still opened holes for three different backs to top 195 yards in a game. This year Iowa must again replace its two best O-linemen [C Austin Blythe, RG Jordan Walsh]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR THE RUN GAME IN 2016?** "They've always had great offensive lines. They do a great job up front with their schemes. The running backs were good. But the guy who makes the difference is Beathard because of his ability to scramble." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Senior TE George Kittle broke out with six TDs last year, tied for the most at his position in the Kirk Ferentz era. And it was the third straight season a tight end scored at least seven TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT IOWA'S CONTINUED SUCCESS AT TIGHT END?** "Everything they do is fundamentally sound. And once you've established that those guys are instrumental in the offense ... it makes recruiting easy." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Three members of Iowa's secondary [6.2 ypa allowed in '15, No. 20 in the FBS] return, including the defense's most dangerous weapon in King. The Big Ten's reigning DB of the year led the Hawkeyes in interceptions [eight, matching a school record]—even as opposing QBs were loath to throw to his side of the field. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT MADE KING A BALL HAWK?** "He's really a good man-to-man player. And when they play their zones, he's got help over the top." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12-2 [8-0]

BOWL GAME Rose Bowl Game Presented by Northwestern Mutual vs. Stanford, 45-16 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING C.J. Beathard: 2,809 yards

RUSHING Jordan Canzeri: 984 yards

RECEIVING Matt VandeBerg: 703 yards

TACKLES Josey Jewell: 126

SACKS Nate Meier: 7

INTERCEPTIONS Desmond King: 8

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	C.J. Beathard	Sr. 6-2 215 ●
RB	LeShun Daniels Jr.	Sr. 6-0 225
WR	Jay Scheel	So. 6-1 195
WR	Matt VandeBerg	Sr. 6-1 190 ●
WR	Jermine Smith	So. 6-1 185
TE	George Kittle	Sr. 6-4 246
C	Sean Welsh	Jr. 6-3 288 ●
RG	James Daniels	So. 6-4 295
LG	Boone Myers	Jr. 6-5 305 ●
RT	Ike Boettger	Jr. 6-6 307
LT	Cole Croston	Sr. 6-5 307 ●
K	Miguel Recinos	So. 6-1 190

DEFENSE	
DE	Parker Hesse So. 6-3 250 ●
DT	Nathan Bazata Jr. 6-2 285 ●
DT	Jaleel Johnson Sr. 6-4 310 ●
DE	Matt Nelson So. 6-8 275
WLB	Aaron Mends So. 6-0 220
MLB	Josey Jewell Jr. 6-2 235 ●
OLB	Ben Niemann Jr. 6-3 230 ●
CB	Desmond King Sr. 5-11 203 ●
CB	Greg Mabin Sr. 5-11 205 ●
SS	Miles Taylor Jr. 6-0 195 ●
FS	Brandon Snyder So. 6-1 210
P	Colten Rastetter RFr. 6-2 205

19

Iowa's D, headlined by King, collected 19 INTs in '15, tied for the fourth most in the Power 5.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.7 ● FPI CHANCE IOWA WINS

9/3 vs. Miami [Ohio] 95% ● 9/10 vs. Iowa State 80% ● 9/17 vs. North Dakota State 82%
9/24 @ Rutgers 67% ● 10/1 vs. Northwestern 72% ● 10/8 @ Minnesota 64%
10/15 @ Purdue 65% ● 10/22 vs. Wisconsin 50% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 @ Penn State 41%
11/12 vs. Michigan 35% ● 11/19 @ Illinois 69% ● 11/25 vs. Nebraska 47%



4 Northwestern

COACH Pat Fitzgerald [11th season]
70-56 [1-5 in bowl games]

After two straight five-win seasons, Northwestern won 10 games in '15—just the fourth such campaign in program history. The Wildcats welcome back enough key pieces (QB Clayton Thorson, LB Anthony Walker) to spur talk of another double-digit run ... but it won't come easy. A tricky home date with Duke and cross-divisional road trips to Columbus and East Lansing loom. —M.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Justin Jackson

The junior has run for 2,605 yards in two years in Evanston, just 94 fewer than Florida State's Heisman hopeful RB Dalvin Cook and more than Shock Linwood [Baylor], Wayne Gallman [Clemson] and Jalen Hurd [Tennessee] in that same time. Jackson won't dazzle—he averaged more than 6 yards per carry in just one outing last year and ran for 10-plus yards only 30 times (No. 43 among FBS backs)—but he's a workhorse. His 312 rushes [third most in the country] accounted for more than half of Northwestern's ground game.

● X-FACTOR WR Solomon Vault

The former RB is the first player in program history to return three kicks for TDs in a career and offers the Wildcats burst that is lacking elsewhere. Northwestern's 22 catches of 20-plus yards in '15 was No. 123 in the FBS, and the Cats were one of three Power 5 teams without a receiver hitting the 400-yard mark. They'll look to Vault's explosiveness to help stretch the field on offense this fall.

● POSITION BATTLE Cornerback

Northwestern loses four-year starter Nick VanHoose, but the Cats are so flush with potential subs that they moved two corners elsewhere—junior Marcus McShepard to receiver and sophomore Parrker Westphal to safety. Veteran CB Matthew Harris [a senior with 27 career starts] will man one side, and Keith Watkins II and Montre Hartage will vie to line up opposite him. Opposing QBs will avoid Harris [4 INTs, 13 passes broken up in '15], so the Watkins-Hartage competition is pivotal.

THE PRESSER

● Thorson struggled late in 2015, failing to reach 100 pass yards in four of his final five games. And after posting at least a serviceable 50.1 QBR in the first six games, he dropped to 39.2 in the last seven. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER YOU EXPECT A JUMP FROM THORSON IN '16?** "It depends on how they approach it. He's got a good set of skills, but we haven't seen all that much yet. The more they ask of him, the more problems could arise." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Northwestern was rock solid defensively for most of 2015, allowing 4.5 ypp, the seventh-best rate in the country. But in losses to Michigan, Iowa and Tennessee, the Wildcats were outscored 123-16. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY HAVE A CEILING?** "Other than two to three guys, they didn't light anybody on fire. They play solid D. But if you can neutralize their best players—and it's not everybody out there—their efficiency drops." —Big Ten offensive coach

● Even with three terrible outings, the Wildcats were No. 2, behind Alabama, in defensive QBR [18.4] in 2015. Much of that success springs from Walker, a junior, who had 20½ TFLs, four sacks and four pass breakups from the middle linebacker spot last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW HE IMPACTS THE GAME?** "He's not just an inside 'backer. They can move him around. He's just so disruptive. You try to get up to the second level to block him, and he's got the toughness to run you over or the speed to go around you." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 [6-2]
BOWL GAME Outback Bowl vs. Tennessee, 45-6 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Clayton Thorson: 1,522 yards
RUSHING Justin Jackson: 1,418 yards
RECEIVING Dan Vitale: 355 yards
TACKLES Anthony Walker: 122
SACKS Deonte Gibson: 9
INTERCEPTIONS Matthew Harris: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Clayton Thorson	So.	6-4 220 ●
RB	Justin Jackson	Jr.	5-11 190 ●
WR	Austin Carr	Sr.	6-1 195
WR	Solomon Vault	Jr.	5-10 190
WR	Flynn Nagel	So.	5-11 190
TE	Garrett Dickerson	Jr.	6-3 245
C	Brad North	Jr.	6-2 290
RG	Shane Mertz	Sr.	6-8 310 ●
LG	Ian Park	Sr.	6-4 305 ●
RT	Eric Olson	Sr.	6-6 295 ●
LT	Blake Hance	So.	6-5 300 ●
K	Jack Mitchell	Sr.	6-3 210 ●

DEFENSE			
DE	Ifeadi Odenigbo	Sr.	6-3 250
DT	Tyler Lancaster	Jr.	6-3 300 ●
DT	C.J. Robbins	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
DE	Joe Gaziano	RFr.	6-4 255
WLB	Jaylen Prater	Sr.	6-0 230 ●
MLB	Anthony Walker	Jr.	6-1 235 ●
SLB	Nate Hall	So.	6-2 230
CB	Keith Watkins II	Jr.	5-11 180
CB	Matthew Harris	Sr.	5-11 180 ●
SS	Godwin Igwebuike	Jr.	6-0 200 ●
FS	Kyle Queiro	Jr.	6-3 200
P	Hunter Niswander	Jr.	6-5 235 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● FPI CHANCE NORTHWESTERN WINS

9/3 vs. Western Michigan 58% ● 9/10 vs. Illinois State 85% ● 9/17 vs. Duke 62%
9/24 vs. Nebraska 33% ● 10/1 @ Iowa 28% ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 @ Michigan State 28%
10/22 vs. Indiana 64% ● 10/29 @ Ohio State 14% ● 11/5 vs. Wisconsin 35%
11/12 @ Purdue 50% ● 11/19 @ Minnesota 48% ● 11/26 vs. Illinois 69%



Jackson is the fifth Wildcat in program history to record back-to-back 1,000-yard rushing seasons.

MARGARET BOWLES/AP IMAGES

5 Minnesota

Once again, the Gophers find themselves in a hole. After logging two straight eight-win campaigns for the first time in more than a decade, Minnesota regressed to 6-7 in a year overshadowed by the resignation of coach Jerry Kill. Longtime DC Tracy Claeys got the nod to take over, but he must replace the core of Minnesota's D while overseeing a new-look offensive system. —M.S.

COACH Tracy Claeys (2nd season)
2-4 (1-0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (2-6)
BOWL GAME Quick Lane Bowl
vs. Central Michigan, 21-14 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Mitch Leidner: 2,701 yards
RUSHING Shannon Brooks: 709 yards
RECEIVING KJ Maye: 773 yards
TACKLES Antonio Johnson: 102
SACKS De'Vondre Campbell: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Brian Boddy-Calhoun: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Mitch Leidner

If quarterbacks were graded solely on toughness, Leidner would be a first-team All-American. He has played through a host of injuries (and this offseason underwent foot surgery) en route to 25 straight starts over the past two years. Unfortunately for the Gophers, his other 2015 marks were decidedly less stellar: a 64.3 QBR (No. 52 in the FBS), 59.5 completion percentage (No. 69) and 14-11 TD-INT ratio (No. 98). Leidner also won't have his top target, KJ Maye, this fall, so he'll shoulder even more of the load to improve Minnesota's 22.5 ppg from last year (No. 106).

X-FACTOR RB Shannon Brooks

He threw a 42-yard TD pass at Iowa. He ran for 174 yards vs. Illinois. He caught 17 passes on the season. And he did it as a true freshman. Look out for Brooks again this year, even as he splits time with fellow sophomore Rodney Smith. Brooks offers the Gophers, who plodded along at a 5.3-ypg clip last year (No. 90 in the FBS), a much-needed big-play option. The dynamic back ranked fourth among Big Ten rushers in ypc last year (6.0).

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

Cody Poock and Jack Lynn return as entrenched veterans (18 combined starts in '15), but the Gophers must fill the outside spot vacated by third-leading tackler De'Vondre Campbell. They have ample options—linebacker is one of Minnesota's deepest units—with the top candidates being junior Jonathan Celestin and senior Nick Rallis, who combined for 61 tackles and 7 TFLs last year.

THE PRESSER

● If Leidner is iffy in the air, he can still be a force on the ground. He ran for six TDs last year and converted 55.0 percent of his third-down rushes (No. 15 among FBS QBs). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW HIS VERSATILITY AFFECTS THE D?** "The main thing is, he's big, so if you blitz, you've really got to put something on it to get him down. We've thought of him in the past as a good enough runner. Not as dynamic as some of the other guys in the league, but he's a threat to extend the play, get out of the pocket and run or throw." —Big Ten defensive coach

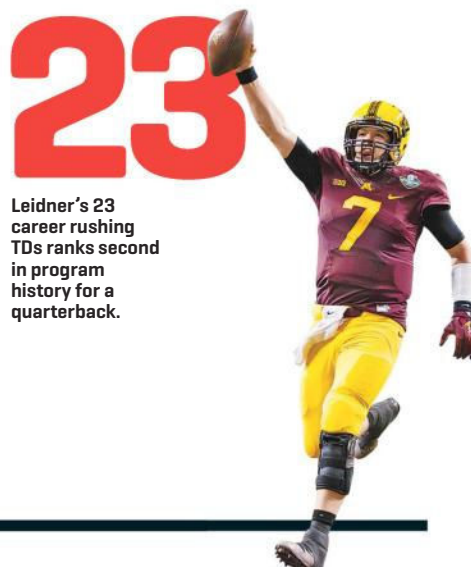
● The Gophers bring former UL Lafayette OC Jay Johnson into the fold, who in turn brings a new offensive attack. Johnson favors the pistol formation and misdirection—a system better suited for potential backup QBs Demry Croft and Seth Green than incumbent Leidner. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THESE CHANGES FIT WITH THE PERSONNEL?** "That team doesn't look to be built for speed. I mean, their punter, their kicker, their holder are bigger than half the guys on a lot of teams. Everybody was big." —Big Ten defensive coach

● Senior DB Jalen Myrick looks ready to step in as Minnesota's next lockdown corner (3 INTs last year), but the secondary is down three starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE DBs?** "Now that those players are gone, I think it's going to be a challenge. Especially at corner, I'll be surprised if the next group is quite as talented." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Mitch Leidner	Sr.	6-4 237 ●
RB	Shannon Brooks	So.	6-0 206 ●
HB	Brandon Lingen	Jr.	6-5 247 ●
WR	Eric Carter	Jr.	5-11 189
WR	Drew Wolitarsky	Sr.	6-3 218 ●
TE	Nate Wozniak	Jr.	6-10 271 ●
C	Tyler Moore	So.	6-4 306 ●
RG	Vincent Calhoun	Jr.	6-4 335
LG	Connor Mayes	Jr.	6-5 328
RT	Jonah Pirsig	Sr.	6-9 316 ●
LT	Garrison Wright	Jr.	6-4 318
K	Ryan Santoso	Jr.	6-6 250 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Gaelin Elmore	Jr.	6-6 266
DT	Andrew Stelter	Jr.	6-4 295 ●
DT	Steven Richardson	Jr.	6-0 291 ●
DE	Hendrick Ekpe	Sr.	6-5 243 ●
OLB	Jonathan Celestin	Jr.	6-1 224
MLB	Cody Poock	Jr.	6-2 230 ●
OLB	Jack Lynn	Sr.	6-3 238 ●
CB	KiAnte Hardin	So.	5-10 170
CB	Jalen Myrick	Sr.	5-10 205
S	Damarius Travis	Sr.	6-2 208
S	Adekunle Ayinde	Jr.	6-0 203 ●
P	Ryan Santoso	Jr.	6-6 250



SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0 ● FPI CHANCE MINNESOTA WINS

9/1 vs. Oregon State 66% ● 9/10 vs. Indiana State 94% ● 9/17 BYE
9/24 vs. Colorado State 84% ● 10/1 @ Penn State 19% ● 10/8 vs. Iowa 36%
10/15 @ Maryland 45% ● 10/22 vs. Rutgers 65% ● 10/29 @ Illinois 46% ● 11/5 vs. Purdue 60%
11/12 @ Nebraska 15% ● 11/19 vs. Northwestern 52% ● 11/26 @ Wisconsin 18%

6 Purdue

COACH Darrell Hazell (4th season)
6-30 (0-0 in bowl games)

Two Big Ten wins in three years does not a solid foundation make. And close calls at Michigan State and Northwestern are nice but don't cut it, so Darrell Hazell replaced both coordinators in a bid to hit reset for 2016. Purdue has invested heavily in young talent, especially on defense, but still looks like a conference lightweight—even in the friendlier Big Ten West. —M.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB David Blough

Blough is the only man left from Hazell's three-man quarterback shuffle. Danny Etling transferred to LSU a year ago; Austin Appleby left for Florida after the 2015 season; and while redshirt freshman Elijah Sindelar remains in the mix, Purdue will likely look to sophomore Blough to cultivate seeds of success from last year's performances against Bowling Green, Nebraska and Northwestern. He posted season highs in QBR in those contests (76.7, 86.8 and 72.2, respectively)—a positive sign with quarterback play still a major bugaboo in the Hazell era.

● X-FACTOR S Leroy Clark

Clark is a playmaker, plain and simple. He led the Boilermakers in tackles (88). He led them in pass breakups (9). He *didn't* lead in INTs (2) but did in interception return yards (66). The elite Miami native is a leader at safety, perhaps Purdue's best unit, and is one of maybe two players on the roster who could start at any Big Ten program. When your team is as lackluster as the one out of West Lafayette has been, that kind of juice is welcome.

● POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

Purdue's goal for the trenches in 2016: Field a lineup. Woes up front last year—lack of size, minimal push—resulted in 30 sacks (T84 in the FBS) and 131.3 rush ypg (No. 108). The Boilermakers lost their two best blockers from '15, and though senior OGs Jordan Roos and Jason King return, and Martesse Patterson and Cameron Cermin look likely for tackle, the hole at center looks more like an abyss.

THE PRESSER

● After one season leading the tight ends, Terry Malone takes over as OC with work to do: QBs have logged a 42.5 QBR in the Hazell era (No. 102 in the FBS). That makes finding the rare Purdue weapon—like senior WR DeAngelo Yancey, whose 14.6 ypc was top 10 in the Big Ten—a challenge. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RECHARGING PURDUE'S ATTACK?** "You see it in bits and pieces. I thought the receivers were quality. They had a good combination of size and downfield speed. And I think Terry will help them find out who they are. If they go forward, in any direction, with a better identity on offense, I think it would be a real positive." —Big Ten defensive coach

● The Purdue D is a mixed bag. It allowed 459.0 ypg last season (No. 110 in the FBS) but loses just one starter on the front seven in '16. Among those returning is senior DT Jake Replogle, a particularly bright spot with 14 TFLs logged in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D-LINE'S STRENGTH?** "The defensive-line play in the Big Ten is better than people think. Everybody has a solid group. Purdue is in that same category. But they're lacking at places in the back end, which makes it more difficult on the guys up front." —Big Ten defensive coach

● The Boilermakers' seven Big Ten losses were by an average of 18 points. They just don't keep it close consistently, even against fellow cellar dwellers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PURDUE'S STRIDES?** "Where can you see them going? Maybe up one spot? There's just not a lot of room yet for that program to make a leap." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 (1-7)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING David Blough: 1,574 yards

RUSHING Markell Jones: 875 yards

RECEIVING DeAngelo Yancey: 700 yards

TACKLES Leroy Clark: 88

SACKS Evan Panfil: 4

INTERCEPTIONS Anthony Brown: 4

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	David Blough	So. 6-1 202 ●
RB	Markell Jones	So. 5-11 207 ●
WR	Cameron Posey	Sr. 6-1 192 ●
WR	DeAngelo Yancey	Sr. 6-2 216 ●
WR	Domonique Young	Sr. 6-3 210 ●
TE	Cole Herdman	So. 6-4 238
C	Kirk Barron	So. 6-2 310
RG	Jordan Roos	Sr. 6-4 301 ●
LG	Jason King	Sr. 6-4 310 ●
RT	Cameron Cermin	Sr. 6-5 310 ●
LT	Martesse Patterson	So. 6-3 340
K	J.D. Dellinger	Fr. 6-2 175

DEFENSE

DE	Evan Panfil	Sr. 6-5 268 ●
DT	Ra'Zahn Howard	Sr. 6-3 325
DT	Jake Replogle	Sr. 6-5 294 ●
DE	Gelen Robinson	Jr. 6-1 265 ●
WLB	Danny Ezechukwu	Jr. 6-2 251 ●
MLB	Ja'Whaun Bentley	Jr. 6-2 250 ●
SLB	Andy James Garcia	Sr. 6-0 228 ●
CB	Da'Wan Hunte	Jr. 5-9 188
CB	Tim Cason	So. 5-11 195
SS	Leroy Clark	Sr. 5-10 197 ●
FS	Robert Gregory	Sr. 6-1 231 ●
P	Joe Schopper	So. 6-0 193 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6 ● FPI CHANCE PURDUE WINS

9/3 vs. Eastern Kentucky 94% ● 9/10 vs. Cincinnati 59% ● 9/17 BYE

9/24 vs. Nevada 81% ● 10/1 @ Maryland 41% ● 10/8 @ Illinois 46%

10/15 vs. Iowa 35% ● 10/22 @ Nebraska 15% ● 10/29 vs. Penn State 33% ● 11/5 @ Minnesota 40%

11/12 vs. Northwestern 50% ● 11/19 vs. Wisconsin 29% ● 11/26 @ Indiana 41%

875



Jones' 875 rush yards in 2015 was the most by a true freshman in program history.

7 Illinois

COACH Lovie Smith [1st season]

Illinois hired NFL mainstay Lovie Smith on March 7 and gave him \$4 million to build a staff—\$1.6 million more than allotted to predecessor Bill Cubit. Smith quickly hired Louisville OC Garrick McGee and San Francisco 49ers LB coach Hardy Nickerson to run the D. In a nod to stability, Smith kept four staffers and hired a Butkus (Luke) to instill some trademark toughness. —M.S.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Wes Lunt

The Illinois-bred signal-caller and former Oklahoma State starter is back for a third season under center, after an up-and-down two years in Champaign. Lunt has a strong arm and finds his man, throwing off target on just 10.1 percent of his passes last year, a respectable 19th among Power 5 QBs. If only his teammates reciprocated. Illini receivers dropped 6.4 percent of their targets, No. 55 in the Power 5. This fall he'll team with his new OC/QB coach, McGee, who brings a pass-heavy "multiple pro-style" attack, in a bid to finally maximize his passing acumen.

● X-FACTOR RB Ke'Shawn Vaughn

After Josh Ferguson, Illinois' top rusher from '14, was sidelined midyear by a shoulder injury, Vaughn emerged as a promising—and durable—backfield threat in 2015. With Ferguson out for the better part of four games, Vaughn took 71 of the Illini's 96 handoffs. At 5-foot-10, 205 pounds, he has good size and should push for 1,000 yards this fall. That's a level of production Illinois has lacked since 2010.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

Before the coaching shuffle, Illinois added Auburn graduate transfer Gimel President to the roster. President started nine games for the Tigers in 2014 before getting demoted to a reserve role last season, so look for the transplant to compete with senior D-linemen Dawuane Smoot and Carroll Phillips to provide a pass-rush boost. Smoot rang up eight sacks last year, but the rest of the Illini combined for only 11.

THE PRESSER

● After completing less than 50 percent of his passes just once in his first seven games in '15, Lunt managed to do so in three of his final five outings. Illinois hopes that's an aberration for the QB, who completed over 60 percent of his passes in 2012 (as a Cowboy) and 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM LUNT AS A SENIOR?** "He throws on time and goes to the open guys. I wouldn't say he's got an overly strong arm, but I thought he was accurate. When he has to make throws, he makes throws." —Big Ten defensive coach

● The Illini lose last year's top receiver, Geronimo Allison, but regain a previous team leader in Mike Dudek. After setting Illinois' single-season freshman records for receiving yards [1,038] and receptions [76] and tying the TD mark [six] in 2014, Dudek sat out all of last year with an ACL tear. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE ILLINI'S MOVING PIECES AT WR?** "They're solid and attack the ball. You can have great receivers, average or below average, but if you have a good quarterback who can put the ball on somebody's body, then you have a chance." —Big Ten defensive coach

● The D ranked top 30 in defensive QBR [34.6], ypg [350.8] and ypp [4.9]—and loses only one full-time starter along the front. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE LINE DISRUPTS OPPONENTS?** "That has been the strength of their D. They are physical at end and have good pass rushers. I thought [Smoot and Phillips] were really disruptive, but I think it's going to take them time. It's been such a transition." —Big Ten offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 [2-6]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Wes Lunt: **2,761** yards

RUSHING Ke'Shawn Vaughn: **723** yards

RECEIVING Geronimo Allison: 882 yards

TACKLES Clayton Fejedelem: 140

SACKS Dawuane Smoot: **8**

INTERCEPTIONS Taylor Barton: **4**

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Wes Lunt	Sr. 6-5 225 ●
RB	Ke'Shawn Vaughn	So. 5-10 205
WR	Malik Turner	Jr. 6-3 205 ●
WR	Dionte Taylor	Sr. 6-0 190 ●
WR	Desmond Cain	So. 5-11 185 ●
TE	Tyler White	Sr. 6-5 255
C	Joe Spencer	Sr. 6-4 300 ●
RG	Nick Allegretti	So. 6-4 305
LG	Gabe Megginson	RFr. 6-5 300
RT	Austin Schmidt	Sr. 6-6 300 ●
LT	Christian DiLauro	Jr. 6-5 300 ●
K	David Reisner	Sr. 6-0 195

DEFENSE

DE	Carroll Phillips	Sr. 6-3 240
NT	Rob Bain	Sr. 6-3 305 ●
DT	Jarrod Clements	Sr. 6-3 290 ●
DE	Dawuane Smoot	Sr. 6-3 265 ●
WLB	Tre Watson	So. 6-2 240
MLB	Hardy Nickerson	Sr. 6-0 230
SLB	James Crawford	Jr. 6-2 220
CB	Darius Mosely	Sr. 5-11 190
CB	Jaylen Dunlap	Jr. 6-1 190
SS	Taylor Barton	Sr. 6-1 215 ●
FS	Caleb Day	Sr. 6-1 205
P	Ryan Frain	Sr. 6-2 220 ●

200

In 2014, Dudek posted the fourth 200-receiving-yard game in Illinois history.



SCHEDULE

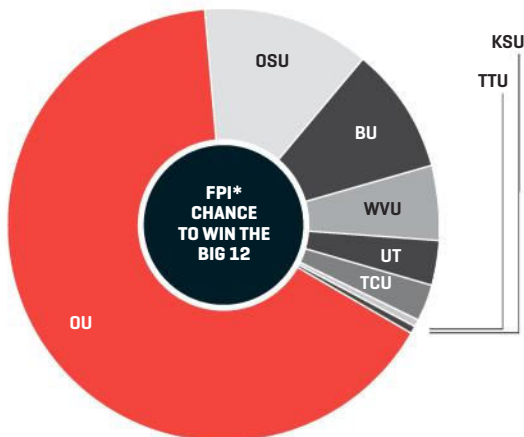
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4 ● FPI CHANCE ILLINOIS WINS

9/3 vs. Murray State **97%** ● **9/10** vs. North Carolina **19%** ● **9/17** vs. Western Michigan **46%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** @ Nebraska **15%** ● **10/8** vs. Purdue **54%** ● **10/15** @ Rutgers **41%**
10/22 @ Michigan **7%** ● **10/29** vs. Minnesota **54%** ● **11/5** vs. Michigan State **29%**
11/12 @ Wisconsin **15%** ● **11/19** vs. Iowa **32%** ● **11/26** @ Northwestern **31%**

BIG 12

Big 12 outlook

	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN CONFERENCE
OKLAHOMA	3	65.4%
OKLAHOMA STATE	10	13.0%
BAYLOR	16	9.9%
WEST VIRGINIA	24	5.7%
TEXAS	29	3.0%
TCU	33	2.6%
TEXAS TECH	45	0.4%
KANSAS STATE	57	0.1%
IOWA STATE	71	0%
KANSAS	107	0%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

AVERAGE
FPI RANK
39.5

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
65%
OKLAHOMA

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **Baker Mayfield** Sr. Oklahoma

ALL-BIG 12

QB **Baker Mayfield** Sr. Oklahoma
RB **Samaje Perine** Jr. Oklahoma
RB **Mike Warren** So. Iowa State
WR **James Washington** Jr. Oklahoma State
WR **KD Cannon** Jr. Baylor
TE **Mark Andrews** So. Oklahoma
OL **Kyle Fuller** Sr. Baylor
OL **Adam Pankey** Sr. West Virginia
OL **Patrick Vahe** So. Texas
OL **Connor Williams** So. Texas
OL **Orlando Brown** So. Oklahoma

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LB **Malik Jefferson** So. Texas

ALL-BIG 12

DL **Charles Walker** Jr. Oklahoma
DL **Noble Nwachukwu** Sr. West Virginia
DL **Demond Tucker** Sr. Iowa State
DL **Will Geary** Jr. Kansas State
LB **Malik Jefferson** So. Texas
LB **Taylor Young** Jr. Baylor
DB **Denzel Johnson** Sr. TCU
CB **Jordan Thomas** Jr. Oklahoma
CB **Duke Shelley** So. Kansas State
S **Jordan Sterns** Sr. Oklahoma State
S **Steven Parker** Jr. Oklahoma

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Matthew McCrane** Jr. Kansas State
P **Austin Seibert** So. Oklahoma
RS **KaVontae Turpin** So. TCU

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

9/17 Pittsburgh @ Oklahoma St. [80*]
9/17 Ohio State @ Oklahoma [88]
9/24 Oklahoma St. @ Baylor [86]

OCTOBER

10/1 Oklahoma @ TCU [86]
10/8 Texas vs. Oklahoma [86]
10/29 West Virginia @ Oklahoma St. [82]

NOVEMBER

11/12 Baylor @ Oklahoma [88]
11/19 Oklahoma @ West Virginia [91]
11/26 Baylor vs. Texas Tech [73]

*Matchup quality [0-100 scale] rates games based on team strength [FPI] and how close the contest is expected to be.



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

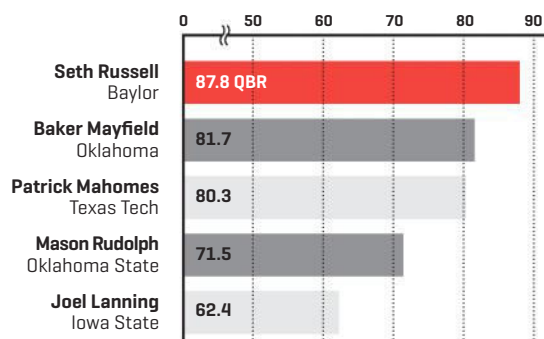
Texas (15th) plays the league's toughest slate. Baylor gets the weakest at 60.

36

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Baylor quarterbacks often can be found on top of lists. But Mayfield and Mahomes also are among the nation's best.



KD Cannon

Baylor's star wideout averaged 17.6 yards per catch on 108 receptions in his first two seasons in Waco.

1 Oklahoma

COACH Bob Stoops (18th season)
179-46 (8-9 in bowl games)

Bob Stoops followed up one of the most disappointing seasons of his career (8-5 in 2014) to capture the Big 12 championship and advance to the College Football Playoff. With 14 starters returning, including brash quarterback Baker Mayfield, the Sooners have the lofty aim of not just getting back to the playoff but winning the whole shootin' match in 2016. —Jake Trotter

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON QB Baker Mayfield**
Mayfield's fearless attitude and fiery approach instantly rubbed off on the Sooners, who averaged 47.6 ppg after an Oct. 10 loss to Texas. The former walk-on had an 81.7 QBR and delivered in clutch moments, most notably in an overtime comeback at Tennessee and a shootout win at Baylor, which ultimately catapulted OU to its first outright Big 12 title in five years. After finishing fourth in the Heisman voting, Mayfield should start this season on the short list of front-runners.

● **X-FACTOR WR Geno Lewis**
Four years ago, Justin Brown transferred in from Penn State to boost Oklahoma's receiving corps. Now the Sooners hope another former Nittany Lion can do the same. Lewis needs to regain his form; he caught 55 passes in 2014, then just 17 last season. But on a unit that graduated All-American Sterling Shepard (86 catches, 1,288 yards, 11 TDs) and returns just one pass catcher with more than 28 receptions (Dede Westbrook, 46), any newcomer is good news.

● **POSITION BATTLE Cornerback**
Dakota Austin and P.J. Mbanasor are both vying to replace All-Big 12 cornerback Zack Sanchez, who declared early for the NFL draft. The Sooners return the rest of a secondary that helped them lead the Big 12 in pass efficiency defense and tie for fifth nationally with 40 sacks. If either Austin or Mbanasor can play at the level of standout juniors Steven Parker and Jordan Thomas, OU will feature one of the nation's most dangerous defensive backfields.

THE PRESSER

● Last season Mayfield led the country in passing efficiency late in games, completing a sizzling 71.2 percent of his passes in the second half and overtime. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MAYFIELD?** "The mentality that he brings rallies up the whole team. Sometimes he doesn't do it the way you'd draw it up, but he gets the job done. He's got good enough skills to make people miss when he runs, and he throws the ball accurately. A dangerous quarterback."
—Big 12 offensive coach

● Samaje Perine and Joe Mixon are one of only six returning Power 5 running back tandems that rushed for at least 2,000 yards last season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TWO RUNNING BACKS?** "I think Mixon is still behind Perine in production and physicality. When OU needed something, it was Perine who was getting the ball. But if Mixon can close the gap between the two, watch out."
—Big 12 defensive coach

● The Sooners had the only defense in the Big 12 that finished with more interceptions (20) than TD passes allowed (19). Sanchez, however, had seven of those picks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT OKLAHOMA'S SECONDARY?** "I know they lost a big-name guy [Sanchez], but I think their defensive back unit will still be very strong again. They have one terrific corner [Thomas] coming back, and they do a great job developing defensive backs. The scheme they run, it helps that, because they're very aggressive; they'll sit on routes." —Big 12 head coach

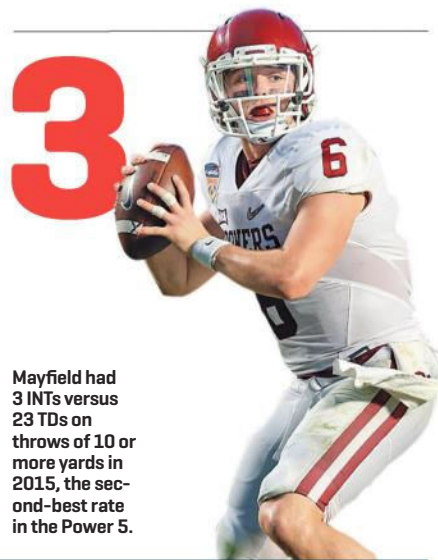
LAST SEASON

RECORD 11-2 (8-1)
BOWL GAME Capital One Orange Bowl vs. Clemson [CFP semifinal], 37-17 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Baker Mayfield: 3,700 yards
RUSHING Samaje Perine: 1,349 yards
RECEIVING Sterling Shepard: 1,288 yards
TACKLES Dominique Alexander: 103
SACKS Eric Striker: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS Zack Sanchez: 7

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Baker Mayfield	Sr.	6-1 212 ●
RB	Samaje Perine	Jr.	5-10 234 ●
WR	Geno Lewis	Sr.	6-1 201
WR	A.D. Miller	So.	6-3 189
WR	Dede Westbrook	Sr.	6-0 170 ●
TE	Mark Andrews	So.	6-5 244 ●
C	Jonathan Alvarez	Jr.	6-3 315 ●
RG	Ben Powers	So.	6-4 320
LG	Cody Ford	RFr.	6-3 317
RT	Dru Samia	So.	6-4 290 ●
LT	Orlando Brown	So.	6-8 340 ●
K	Austin Seibert	So.	5-10 214 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Charles Walker	Jr.	6-2 305
NT	Matthew Romar	Jr.	6-0 298 ●
DE	Matt Dimon	Sr.	6-2 275 ●
OLB	Ogbonnia Okoronkwo	Jr.	6-2 250
ILB	Tay Evans	So.	6-2 239
ILB	Jordan Evans	Sr.	6-2 233 ●
OLB	Caleb Kelly	Fr.	6-3 230
CB	Jordan Thomas	Jr.	6-0 190 ●
CB	P.J. Mbanasor	So.	6-1 189
SS	Steven Parker	Jr.	6-1 208 ●
FS	Ahmad Thomas	Sr.	6-1 210 ●
P	Austin Seibert	So.	5-10 214 ●



Mayfield had 3 INTs versus 23 TDs on throws of 10 or more yards in 2015, the second-best rate in the Power 5.

TOM DIPACE

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.4 ● FPI CHANCE OKLAHOMA WINS

9/3 vs. Houston (NRG Stadium, Houston) 91% ● 9/10 vs. UL Monroe 99% ● 9/17 vs. Ohio State 81%
9/24 BYE ● 10/1 @ TCU 82% ● 10/8 vs. Texas (Dallas) 83% ● 10/15 vs. Kansas State 95%
10/22 @ Texas Tech 88% ● 10/29 vs. Kansas 99% ● 11/3 @ Iowa State 93%
11/12 vs. Baylor 80% ● 11/19 @ West Virginia 73% ● 11/26 BYE ● 12/3 vs. Oklahoma State 77%

2 Oklahoma State

COACH Mike Gundy (12th season)
94-47 (6-4 in bowl games)

Oklahoma State wants to finish the job after its Big 12 title hopes fell apart with a season-ending three-game losing streak. Replacing Big 12 co-defensive player of the year Emmanuel Ogbah will be tough, but OSU returns one of the league's top QBs in Mason Rudolph, and Stanford graduate transfer Barry Sanders could provide a much-needed boost at running back. —Brandon Chatmon

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (7-2)
BOWL GAME Allstate Sugar Bowl
vs. Mississippi, 48-20 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Mason Rudolph: 3,770 yards
RUSHING Chris Carson: 517 yards
RECEIVING James Washington: 1,087 yards
TACKLES Jordan Sterns: 108
SACKS Emmanuel Ogbah: 13
INTERCEPTIONS Chad Whitener: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Mason Rudolph

Oklahoma State's hopes of returning to Big 12 title contention rest on the shoulders of Rudolph. After a solid season splitting time with J.W. Walsh, Rudolph is finally the unquestioned leader of the offense. The 6-foot-5, 235-pound junior passed for 3,770 yards, 21 TDs and 9 INTs. He had six 300-yard games (three with more than 400 yards), but his 71.5 adjusted QBR leaves plenty of room for improvement.

X-FACTOR DT Vincent Taylor

Taylor will take on a bigger role after a sophomore season that included 48 tackles, 8½ tackles for loss and five sacks. The 6-3, 310-pounder had five games with at least five tackles. But he won't have Ogbah, who led the Big 12 in sacks, drawing attention on the outside, meaning Taylor will become the focus of opposing offenses for the first time in his career.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

The Cowboys have a tradition of quality running backs, but the well has run dry—they haven't had a 1,000-yard rusher since 2012. Last year's leader, junior college transfer Chris Carson, rushed for 517 yards and four touchdowns but averaged just 3.95 ypc. Now the Cowboys hope to restore their legacy: Barry Sanders (yes, son of the OSU legend) arrives as a graduate transfer from Stanford, where he averaged 5.84 ypc as a reserve. He'll compete with Carson and as many as six other running backs, including two freshmen, for a spot in the lineup.

THE PRESSER

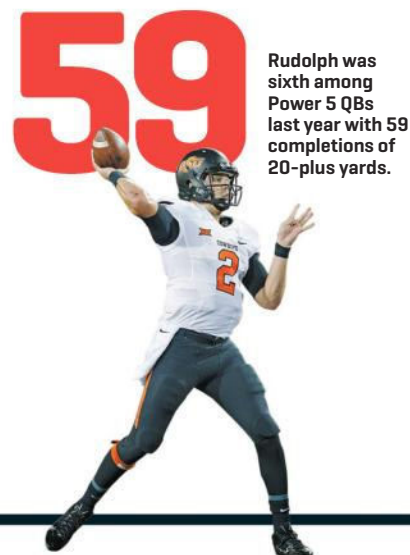
Rudolph passed for 352 yards and five TDs in a win over TCU, but road games at Texas and West Virginia (one TD, five picks) showed that Rudolph's arm might be suspect. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MASON RUDOLPH?** "He's a good player, but he doesn't scare you. I don't think he's dynamic like, say, the kid at Texas Tech. He's a pocket passer and he doesn't have a cannon. He's not Brandon Weeden, even if they want him to be." —Big 12 offensive coach

Oklahoma State has forced 75 turnovers since Glenn Spencer took over as defensive coordinator in 2013, ranking third in the conference. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ATTACKING THE OSU DEFENSE?** "You have to do a good job of deciphering coverage. Glenn will do some different things, like go with a prevent look on second-and-10, so you have to do a good job in practice because you never know what you're going to get." —Big 12 offensive coach

Rudolph helped OSU get out to a 10-0 start last season, but the Cowboys lost to Baylor and Oklahoma after he hurt his foot and then suffered a third straight loss to Ole Miss in the Allstate Sugar Bowl. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW OSU CAN BE LESS RELIANT ON RUDOLPH?** "You know [Rudolph is] a competitor because he makes big plays when they need them. They won so many close games. You have to give him credit because he didn't have a consistent running game. The key for him this year is they have to develop a running game. He needs help." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Mason Rudolph	Jr.	6-5 235 ●
RB	Barry Sanders	Sr.	5-10 198 ●
WR	James Washington	Jr.	6-0 205 ●
WR	Marcell Ateman	Sr.	6-4 215 ●
WR	Jalen McCleskey	So.	5-10 170
TE	Blake Jarwin	Sr.	6-5 248 ●
C	Brad Lundblade	Jr.	6-3 300 ●
RG	Jesse Robinson	Jr.	6-5 315 ●
LG	Michael Wilson	Sr.	6-6 305 ●
RT	Zachary Crabtree	Jr.	6-7 310 ●
LT	Victor Salako	Sr.	6-6 335 ●
K	Ben Grogan	Sr.	6-1 190 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Tralund Webber	Jr.	6-5 250
DT	Motekiai Maile	Sr.	6-3 315 ●
DT	Vincent Taylor	Jr.	6-3 310 ●
DE	Jarrell Owens	So.	6-3 270
WLB	Devante Averette	Sr.	5-11 230
MLB	Chad Whitener	Jr.	6-0 248 ●
SLB	Jordan Burton	Sr.	6-3 215 ●
CB	Ramon Richards	Jr.	5-11 185
CB	Ashton Lampkin	Sr.	6-0 190 ●
SS	Tre Flowers	Jr.	6-3 198 ●
FS	Jordan Sterns	Sr.	6-0 200 ●
P	Zach Sinor	So.	5-10 215 ●



Rudolph was sixth among Power 5 QBs last year with 59 completions of 20-plus yards.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● FPI CHANCE OKLAHOMA STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Southeastern Louisiana 99% ● 9/10 vs. Central Michigan 94% ● 9/17 vs. Pittsburgh 76%
9/24 @ Baylor 45% ● 10/1 vs. Texas 72% ● 10/8 vs. Iowa State 92% ● 10/15 BYE
10/22 @ Kansas 96% ● 10/29 vs. West Virginia 72% ● 11/5 @ Kansas State 81%
11/12 vs. Texas Tech 85% ● 11/19 @ TCU 59% ● 11/26 BYE 59% ● 12/3 @ Oklahoma 23%

3 Baylor

COACH Art Briles (9th season)
65-37 (3-3 in bowl games)

A College Football Playoff spot is the target a year after injuries sidelined quarterbacks Seth Russell and Jarrett Stidham and ended the Bears' hopes of a third straight Big 12 title. Both quarterbacks return, but coach Art Briles has to replace 237 career starts on the offensive and defensive lines. If he can, Baylor will keep on scoring and again be in the title chase. —B.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (6-3)
BOWL GAME Russell Athletic Bowl vs. North Carolina, 49-38 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Seth Russell: **2,104 yards**
RUSHING Shock Linwood: **1,329 yards**
RECEIVING Corey Coleman: 1,363 yards
TACKLES Grant Campbell: 97
SACKS Andrew Billings: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS Xavien Howard: 5

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON The quarterbacks

The good news: It can't get as unlucky as last year, right? Russell suffered a neck injury after leading the Bears to a 7-0 start. True freshman Stidham then completed 23 of 33 passes for 419 yards and three scores in his first start on the road at Kansas State before suffering a season-ending ankle injury two games later. Both return, and Briles knows either player has the goods to lead Baylor to a Big 12 title after the duo combined to pass for 3,369 yards and 41 touchdowns with just eight interceptions. With both at full strength, Baylor can afford to rest Russell and preserve his health.

● X-FACTOR LB/DB Travon Blanchard

Blanchard should be the defense's top returning playmaker. The junior's tendency to rise to the occasion in big games (29 combined tackles against Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and TCU) could be a key asset for a unit that is a relative unknown. Blanchard's abilities against both the run and the pass make him an ideal hybrid defender in the Big 12.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive line

Andrew Billings became the Big 12's most disruptive defensive force and headed to the NFL draft after a stellar junior season. Baylor is counting on juco transfer Jeremy Faulk to step up in the interior, but frankly, the Bears will need multiple players to replace Billings. DE K.J. Smith and DT Byron Bonds have already combined for 19 starts when filling in due to injuries, and Bonds has played in 33 games. Junior DE Brian Nance had two sacks off the bench last season.

THE PRESSER

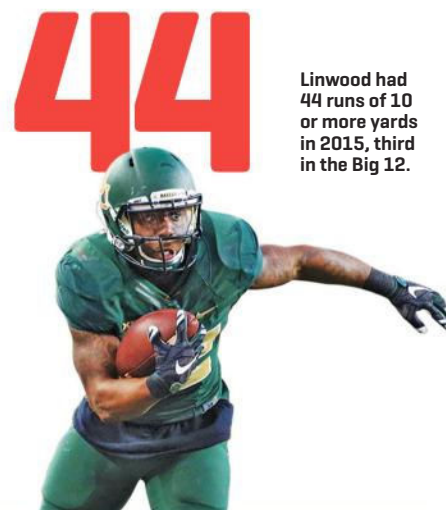
● Briles' offensive system has always caused problems, but it became nearly impossible to stop when he began landing NFL-level athletes. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OVERALL TALENT IN THE PROGRAM?** "They're getting in the same game as Oklahoma and Texas. They've recruited well. People don't like to hear it, but it's the truth. Offensively, their talent is as good as anyone's. Defensively, they're probably a few classes behind." —Big 12 head coach

● The result of the talent increase has been an offense that has averaged an FBS-best 3.24 points per drive and 7.18 yards per play since 2011. The Bears' 1.11 points per drive and 3.53 yards per play on a sloppy, muddy field in a driving rainstorm against TCU a year ago were Baylor's lowest marks during that span. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TRYING TO MATCH BAYLOR'S OFFENSE?** "You kind of know you have to score more. I guess the only way to stop them is chilly weather and a monsoon." —Big 12 offensive coach

● Corey Coleman, the 2015 Biletnikoff Award winner, left early for the NFL, but junior KD Cannon easily slides into the No. 1 wideout spot. In his first two seasons, he caught 108 passes for 1,898 yards (17.6 ypc) and 14 touchdowns. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING CANNON?** "He has size, speed and strength. He kind of reminds me of the way Justin Blackmon used to be at Oklahoma State, the way he can kind of control a game. He will seem quiet, then you look up and he's over 100 yards." —Big 12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Seth Russell	Sr.	6-3 220 ●
RB	Shock Linwood	Sr.	5-9 200 ●
WR	Tren'Davian Dickson	Fr.	5-11 170
WR	Chris Platt	So.	5-11 170
WR	KD Cannon	Jr.	6-0 180 ●
WR	Lynx Hawthorne	Sr.	6-0 205 ●
C	Kyle Fuller	Sr.	6-5 315 ●
RG	Rami Hamad	Jr.	6-4 335
LG	B.J. Autry	Jr.	6-3 320
RT	Ishmael Wilson	Jr.	6-4 305
LT	Dom Desouza	Jr.	6-6 310
K	Chris Callahan	Jr.	5-9 200 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Brian Nance	Jr.	6-3 245
NT	Jeremy Faulk	Jr.	6-1 295
DE	K.J. Smith	Jr.	6-2 260
OLB	Taylor Young	Jr.	5-10 225 ●
WLB	Raaquan Davis	Jr.	6-2 225
MLB	Aiavion Edwards	Sr.	6-1 225
OLB	Travon Blanchard	Jr.	6-2 205 ●
CB	Jameson Houston	RFr.	6-0 190
CB	Ryan Reid	Sr.	5-11 190 ●
SS	Chance Waz	Jr.	6-0 185 ●
FS	Orion Stewart	Sr.	6-2 200 ●
P	Drew Galitz	So.	6-0 195 ●



RAY CARLIN/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● FPI CHANCE BAYLOR WINS

9/3 vs. Northwestern State **99%** ● 9/10 vs. SMU **95%** ● 9/17 @ Rice **96%**
9/24 vs. Oklahoma State **55%** ● 10/1 @ Iowa State **82%** ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 vs. Kansas **98%**
10/22 BYE ● 10/29 @ Texas **60%** ● 11/5 vs. TCU **73%** ● 11/12 @ Oklahoma **20%**
11/19 vs. Kansas State **86%** ● 11/25 vs. Texas Tech (Arlington, Texas) **78%** ● 12/3 @ West Virginia **49%**

4 West Virginia

COACH Dana Holgorsen (6th season)
36-28 (2-2 in bowl games)

Dana Holgorsen is known for his offensive prowess, and the Mountaineers likely will need all of his tricks after losing 10 defenders who had double-digit starts in their careers. Eight wins and a bowl victory weren't enough to firm up Holgorsen's future with the Mountaineers as contract talks stalled, making this fall crucial if he wants to avoid the ax before his contract is up in 2017. —B.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Skyler Howard

Howard had an inconsistent 2015 season. He passed for 3,145 yards and 26 touch-downs, but despite a QB-friendly system, he also threw 14 interceptions and surpassed 300 yards just twice. Accuracy was an issue, as he completed less than 50 percent of his passes in four of his 13 starts, and his 55.3 adjusted QBR was seventh in the Big 12. But there is reason for optimism—Howard ended the season by setting Cactus Bowl records with 532 passing yards and five passing TDs in a 43-42 win over Arizona State.

● X-FACTOR DE Noble Nwachukwu

Nwachukwu's name rarely comes up when debating the Big 12's top defenders, but he finished his junior season with 8½ sacks and 13 tackles for loss, tied for fourth and 10th, respectively, in the conference. The 6-foot-2, 275-pound senior registered all but one of his sacks against conference opponents, including three in a 38-20 win against Texas.

● POSITION BATTLE Cornerback

The Mountaineers will have to replace one of the Big 12's top cornerback duos in Daryl Worley and Terrell Chestnut, key parts of a defense that grabbed 23 interceptions last season, tied for second in the country. But they have three experienced seniors competing for the two vacancies: Antonio Crawford played in 38 games for Miami and sat out last season after transferring, Nana Kyeremeh has appeared in 30 games and 6-2, 208-pound Rasul Douglas played in 11 games last season after transferring from Nassau CC.

THE PRESSER

● Defensive coordinator Tony Gibson has a 3-3-5 system built for the spread-heavy Big 12. Last season WVU allowed 24.6 ppg, second only to Oklahoma in the conference, and it ranked fourth in the nation in interception percentage per pass attempt (5.1).

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE WEST VIRGINIA DEFENSE? "It's high risk, high reward. Before, their system was an advantage, but more people are doing similar things. A few years ago we'd see that look maybe 20 to 30 percent of the time. This year we'll probably see it 70 percent of the time." —Big 12 head coach

● One of the few proven players on defense, Nwachukwu is poised to become a three-year starter for the Mountaineers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLANNING TO FACE NWACHUKWU?** "He's a very solid player, but he's not a guy like Emmanuel Ogbah or Eric Striker. He's a guy who can make plays, and you have to account for him, but we didn't spend as much time talking about him." —Big 12 offensive coach

● In a departure from Holgorsen's pass-heavy reputation, the Mountaineers relied on the run last season, gaining more first downs on the ground (172) than through the air (150) and averaging 4.77 yards per carry. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM WEST VIRGINIA'S OFFENSE?** "It will be interesting to see if he returns to that Mike Leach style. I think they weren't sure if they had the quarterback, but we'll see what they do this year." —Big 12 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (4-5)

BOWL GAME Motel 6 Cactus Bowl

vs. Arizona State, 43-42 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Skyler Howard: 3,145 yards

RUSHING Wendell Smallwood: 1,519 yards

RECEIVING Shelton Gibson: 887 yards

TACKLES Nick Kwiatkoski: 86

SACKS Noble Nwachukwu: 8½

INTERCEPTIONS Daryl Worley: 6

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Skyler Howard	Sr. 6-0 207 ●
RB	Rushel Shell	Sr. 5-10 220
FB	Elijah Wellman	Jr. 6-1 235
WR	Daikiel Shorts Jr.	Sr. 6-1 204 ●
WR	Shelton Gibson	Jr. 5-11 195 ●
WR	Jovon Durante	So. 6-0 165 ●
C	Tyler Orlosky	Sr. 6-4 295 ●
RG	Kyle Bosch	Jr. 6-5 308 ●
LG	Adam Pankey	Sr. 6-5 316 ●
RT	Marcell Lazard	Jr. 6-6 310
LT	Yodny Cajuste	So. 6-5 300 ●
K	Josh Lambert	Sr. 6-0 203 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Noble Nwachukwu	Sr. 6-2 275 ●
NT	Darrien Howard	Sr. 6-1 297
DE	Christian Brown	Sr. 6-2 298 ●
SLB	Xavier Preston	Jr. 6-2 236
WLB	Sean Walters	Sr. 6-2 228
MLB	Al-Rasheed Benton	Jr. 6-1 235
DB	Marvin Gross Jr.	Jr. 6-3 208
CB	Nana Kyeremeh	Sr. 5-10 186
CB	Rasul Douglas	Sr. 6-2 208
SS	Jarrod Harper	Sr. 6-0 210 ●
FS	Dravon Askew-Henry	Jr. 5-11 198 ●
P	Billy Kinney	So. 6-4 207



Gibson averaged 24 yards per reception, second best in the FBS.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.9 ● FPI CHANCE WEST VIRGINIA WINS

9/3 vs. Missouri **80%** ● **9/10** vs. Youngstown State **97%** ● **9/17** BYE

9/24 vs. BYU (Lander, Maryland) **77%** ● **10/1** vs. Kansas State **84%** ● **10/8** BYE

10/15 @ Texas Tech **64%** ● **10/22** vs. TCU **65%** ● **10/29** @ Oklahoma State **28%** ● **11/5** vs. Kansas **96%**

11/12 @ Texas **44%** ● **11/19** vs. Oklahoma **27%** ● **11/26** @ Iowa State **76%** ● **12/3** vs. Baylor **51%**

5 Texas

COACH Charlie Strong (3rd season)
11-14 (0-1 in bowl games)

It's make-or-break time for third-year coach Charlie Strong, who has yet to deliver a winning record in Austin. Strong has put together impressive recruiting classes, including a top-10 haul this year. But if Texas doesn't begin to show progress on the field, Strong might not survive. His hopes are riding on a new offense, but does Texas have the QB to run it? —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 (4-5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jerrod Heard: **1,214** yards
RUSHING D'Onta Foreman: **681** yards
RECEIVING John Burt: **457** yards
TACKLES Peter Jinkens: 75
SACKS Peter Jinkens: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Dylan Haines: 5

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Malik Jefferson

There might not be a more dynamic defender in the Big 12 than Jefferson, a sophomore who already has become the face and vocal leader of the Texas defense. Strong put him in the lineup right out of the gate and started Jefferson nine times. The reigning Big 12 defensive freshman of the year was second on the team with 61 tackles, seven for loss, and scored on a fumble return against Rice.

● X-FACTOR WR John Burt

Last season Texas didn't have a single pass catcher finish in the top 20 in the Big 12 in receiving. But as the Longhorns transition into a version of the Baylor offense under new coordinator Sterlin Gilbert, they will have to find a standout receiver or two to make the attack work. One option will be 6-foot-3 sophomore Burt, a former ESPN 300 signee who led Texas with 457 receiving yards last season as a true freshman.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

No surprise here. The Longhorns have endured quarterback turmoil dating all the way back to Colt McCoy's graduation seven years ago, which is the biggest reason Texas hasn't reached double-digit wins since making the 2009 national title game. Last season Texas juggled Jerrod Heard and Tyrone Swoopes with little success. That means the Longhorns will stage yet another QB derby, among Heard, Swoopes and highly touted incoming freshman Shane Buechele. Despite Swoopes' struggles, his edge in experience could make him the favorite to open as the starter.

THE PRESSER

● The Longhorns ranked last in the Big 12 in passing in 2015, finishing with just nine touchdown passes—the same total as Navy, which runs a triple-option offense.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS' QBs? "To be honest, that position right now is the difference between them winning six games and them winning 10 games. You can hone in on what they do and cheat your coverage because of their quarterbacks' inability to throw the football." —Big 12 defensive coach

● Strong brought in Gilbert, a disciple of Art Briles' fast-paced philosophy, from Tulsa to improve the Longhorns' passing game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS' PERSONNEL IN THE NEW OFFENSE?** "It's not as easy as people think it is to put that in. You have to be able to practice it the right way. Do they have a quarterback to run it? Who knows? We will have to wait and see. That system didn't become great until [former Baylor quarterback] Robert Griffin started running it." —Big 12 offensive coach

● As a true freshman, Jefferson recorded nine tackles in each of his first three games, then followed that up with two sacks in the Longhorns' upset of Oklahoma. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JEFFERSON?** "He's unbelievably talented. I think he's going to be one of the best players in the league. Great size, great athleticism, very instinctual. Can rush off the edge, can play the run, can drop into coverage. An excellent player." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Shane Buechele	Fr.	6-1 191 ●
RB	Chris Warren III	So.	6-2 255
WR	John Burt	So.	6-3 189 ●
WR	Armani Foreman	Jr.	5-11 209 ●
WR	Collin Johnson	Fr.	6-6 212
TE	Andrew Beck	Jr.	6-3 244 ●
C	Zach Shackelford	Fr.	6-3 296
RG	Jake McMillon	So.	6-3 294
LG	Patrick Vahe	So.	6-3 326 ●
RT	Kent Perkins	Sr.	6-5 320 ●
LT	Connor Williams	So.	6-6 288 ●
K	Jon Coppers	RFr.	6-0 198

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Charles Omenihu	So.	6-6 262 ●
NT	Paul Boyette Jr.	Sr.	6-3 314 ●
DT	Poona Ford	Jr.	5-11 313
DE	Naashon Hughes	Jr.	6-4 239 ●
SLB	Anthony Wheeler	So.	6-2 232
MLB	Malik Jefferson	So.	6-3 238 ●
WLB	Timothy Cole	Sr.	6-1 240
CB	Holton Hill	So.	6-2 195 ●
CB	Davante Davis	So.	6-2 199 ●
SS	Brandon Jones	Fr.	6-0 195 ●
FS	Jason Hall	Jr.	6-3 219 ●
P	Michael Dickson	So.	6-2 213 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0 ● FPI CHANCE TEXAS WINS

9/4 vs. Notre Dame 46% ● 9/10 vs. UTEP 98% ● 9/17 @ California 56% ● 9/24 BYE
10/1 @ Oklahoma State 28% ● 10/8 vs. Oklahoma (Dallas) 17% ● 10/15 vs. Iowa State 85%
10/22 @ Kansas State 66% ● 10/29 vs. Baylor 40% ● 11/5 @ Texas Tech 58%
11/12 vs. West Virginia 56% ● 11/19 @ Kansas 91% ● 11/25 vs. TCU 61%



Jefferson had three of the four pass breakups by Texas line-backers in 2015.

COACH Gary Patterson (16th season)
143-47 (9-5 in bowl games)

What will life be like after Trevone Boykin? The Horned Frogs quickly rose to the upper echelon of the Big 12 with 23 wins over the past two seasons as Boykin became one of the nation's best quarterbacks. Texas A&M transfer Kenny Hill is ready to step in, but he'll have to break in a go-to receiver to keep TCU in the chase for a second Big 12 title in three seasons. —B.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Kenny Hill

Hill impressed coaches while running the scout team in 2015, yet he has gigantic shoes to fill with Boykin's departure. TCU's offense has been among the nation's best since co-coordinators Doug Meacham and Sonny Cumbie arrived two seasons ago. With Boykin running the new system, the Horned Frogs averaged 6.73 yards per play after averaging 5.29 in 2012 and '13. Hill, who threw for 2,649 yards, 23 touchdowns and eight interceptions in eight starts for the Aggies in 2014, has to maintain that standard.

X-FACTOR DE James McFarland

McFarland entered the offseason a forgotten man after missing 2015 with a broken toe suffered when he stepped on a sprinkler head. But the defensive MVP of the 2014 Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl is set to provide pass-rushing punch for a Horned Frogs defense that needs to be much improved. McFarland had seven sacks and three forced fumbles in 2014. Last season TCU finished fifth in the Big 12 with 32 sacks. With three other injured players now healthy, the defense could return 11 vets with starting experience.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

Replacing TCU's go-to receiver, Josh Doctson, goes hand in hand with breaking in a new quarterback. The Frogs signed coveted junior college transfer Taj Williams and will feature junior Emanuel Porter and dynamic sophomore slot receiver KaVontae Turpin (45 catches, 649 yards, 8 TDs), but there is no proven No. 1 target on the roster.

THE PRESSER

Hill replaced Johnny Manziel at Texas A&M and threw for 511 yards and three TDs against South Carolina in his first start. But he struggled against Mississippi State, Ole Miss and Alabama—throwing six touchdowns and six interceptions—and lost his starting job, sparking questions about his performance against top teams. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT KENNY HILL TAKING OVER?** "I like Hill and what he did at Texas A&M, but he has a ways to go to fill Boykin's shoes. They may need to make up [the difference in production] in other ways." —Big 12 offensive coach

TCU has had the Big 12's best defense since joining the conference in 2012, allowing a league best in points per drive (1.66) and yards per play (5.25) in conference games over that time. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU GAME-PLAN FOR TCU'S DEFENSE?** "Gary does a good job stopping the run, using run fits, clogging up the middle. They're just not going to let you run it. You have to be able to throw the ball against them if you want to have success." —Big 12 head coach

Last season against Texas, Turpin had 138 receiving yards and hauled in four touchdowns, the most in a game by a freshman in Big 12 history. Though he's just 5-foot-9 and 152 pounds, Turpin will again be counted on as an all-purpose threat. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER KAVONTAE TURPIN IS UP TO THE TASK?** "He's shifty, a playmaker. He has the skills that fit in our league. And he has that chip on his shoulder." —Big 12 head coach

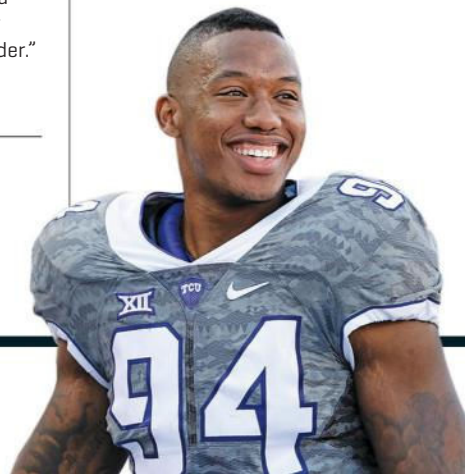
LAST SEASON

RECORD 11-2 (7-2)
BOWL GAME Valero Alamo Bowl
vs. Oregon, 47-41 W (3OT)
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Trevone Boykin: 3,575 yards
RUSHING Aaron Green: 1,272 yards
RECEIVING Josh Doctson: 1,327 yards
TACKLES **Travin Howard: 105**
SACKS **Josh Carraway: 9**
INTERCEPTIONS Derrick Kindred: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Kenny Hill	Jr.	6-1 215
RB	Kyle Hicks	Jr.	5-10 200
WR	KaVontae Turpin	So.	5-9 152 ●
WR	Deante' Gray	Sr.	5-10 175
WR	Ty Slanina	Jr.	6-0 193 ●
WR	John Diarse	Jr.	6-1 209
C	Austin Schlottman	Jr.	6-6 300
RG	Matt Pryor	Jr.	6-7 350
LG	Patrick Morris	Jr.	6-3 300
RT	Aviante Collins	Sr.	6-6 295
LT	Joseph Noteboom	Jr.	6-5 320 ●
K	Jonathan Song	So.	5-10 170
DEFENSE			
DE	Josh Carraway	Sr.	6-4 250 ●
DT	Breylin Mitchell	So.	6-4 270 ●
DT	Aaron Curry	Sr.	6-2 280 ●
DE	James McFarland	Sr.	6-3 255
MLB	Montrel Wilson	So.	6-3 208 ●
SLB	Travin Howard	Jr.	6-1 210 ●
CB	Ranthonny Texada	Jr.	5-10 170 ●
CB	Jeff Gladney	RFr.	5-10 175
WS	Nick Orr	Jr.	5-10 180 ●
SS	Denzel Johnson	Sr.	6-2 205 ●
FS	Markell Simmons	So.	6-1 205
P	Adam Nunez	RFr.	6-0 180

9 Carraway was the only FBS player with at least nine sacks and three fumble recoveries in 2015.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1 ● FPI CHANCE TCU WINS

9/3 vs. South Dakota State 23% ● 9/10 vs. Arkansas 53% ● 9/17 vs. Iowa State 84%
9/23 @ SMU 84% ● 10/1 vs. Oklahoma 18% ● 10/8 @ Kansas 90%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 @ West Virginia 36% ● 10/29 vs. Texas Tech 71% ● 11/5 @ Baylor 27%
11/12 BYE ● 11/19 vs. Oklahoma State 41% ● 11/25 @ Texas 39% ● 12/3 vs. Kansas State 79%

7 Texas Tech

COACH Kliff Kingsbury (4th season)
19-19 (1-1 in bowl games)

After failing to reach a bowl game in his second season, coach Kliff Kingsbury bounced back with seven wins in 2015. Texas Tech has continued to struggle defensively under Kingsbury, but with electric junior quarterback Patrick Mahomes, Tech won't have a problem lighting up scoreboards. But becoming a factor in the Big 12 title race, well ... —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 (4-5)
BOWL GAME Advocare V100 Texas Bowl vs. LSU, 56-27 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Patrick Mahomes: 4,653 yards
RUSHING DeAndre Washington: 1,492 yards
RECEIVING Jakeem Grant: 1,268 yards
TACKLES Micah Awe: 126
SACKS Pete Robertson: 5
INTERCEPTIONS J.J. Gaines: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON QB Patrick Mahomes**
In his first season as the full-time starter, Mahomes finished fourth in the country with 357.9 passing yards a game last year. He also tossed 36 touchdowns [tied for the Big 12 lead with Baker Mayfield] while rushing for 456 yards and 10 scores. The Red Raiders graduated key players at every other position offensively from last year's dynamic scoring attack. But with Mahomes, Texas Tech could still feature its best offense yet under Kingsbury.

● **X-FACTOR DT Breiden Fehoko**
Last season the defense allowed 279.9 rushing yards per game, ranking 126th in the nation, ahead of only Eastern Michigan. The Red Raiders have been searching for an impact player on the defensive line whom they can build around, and they might finally have found him in Fehoko, a 6-foot-3, 295-pound sophomore. The prized recruit [No. 51 in the ESPN 300] started every game at defensive tackle as a true freshman last year and will have the benefit of playing with two eligible transfers, DT Ondre Pipkins [Michigan] and LB Kolin Hill [Notre Dame].

● **POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver**
With record-breaking wideout Jakeem Grant gone, Mahomes is looking for his next go-to receiver. The Red Raiders have intriguing options, including Derrick Willies, the No. 1 juco receiver in the country, who chose Tech over Oklahoma. But keep an eye on Dylan Cantrell, who is healthy after missing last year with a back injury. Cantrell and Mahomes starred together in high school in Whitehouse, Texas.

THE PRESSER

● Since Mahomes took over as starting QB in November 2014, he has tossed 50 touchdowns. No returning quarterback in college football has thrown for more over that span.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MAHOMES?
"He's the best quarterback in the Big 12, from seeing the field and distributing the ball to being able to run. He's big and tough to bring down. I really like his skill set. Now that he has given up baseball [he played outfield and pitched for Tech], I think he's going to be even better." —Big 12 defensive coach

● Last year David Gibbs became Texas Tech's seventh defensive coordinator in as many seasons. The team showed little improvement, finishing next to last in the country in stopping the run.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS TECH'S DEFENSE? "It's been so many years in a row where they've had a new DC. That's going to hurt you. But Gibbs will do a hell of a job. He's a really good coach. It's not going to happen overnight. But I think he'll get that thing going." —Big 12 offensive coach

● After finishing second in the nation in passing last season, Texas Tech brings back all but one key target, but that guy happens to be Grant, the school's all-time leading receiver.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TECH'S PASSING GAME? "Kliff did a great job of game-planning ways of getting Jakeem the ball in space. But there's not a guy there now that can make nine guys miss and go 90 yards. They're going to have a different mindset. Kliff might have to be a little more patient." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Patrick Mahomes	Jr.	6-5 230 ●
RB	Justin Stockton	Jr.	5-10 200
WR	Devin Lauderdale	Sr.	5-10 180 ●
WR	Reginald Davis	Sr.	6-0 185 ●
WR	Ian Sadler	Jr.	5-11 195 ●
WR	Cameron Batson	Jr.	5-9 175
C	Tony Morales	Sr.	6-3 295 ●
RG	Justin Murphy	So.	6-6 310
LG	Madison Akamnonu	RFr.	6-5 310 ●
RT	Terence Steele	RFr.	6-6 300
LT	Baylon Brown	Sr.	6-5 305 ●
K	Clayton Hatfield	So.	5-10 170 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Zach Barnes	Jr.	6-3 240
NG	Broderick Washington	RFr.	6-3 305
DT	Breiden Fehoko	So.	6-3 295 ●
DE	Gary Moore	Jr.	6-5 240
WLB	D'Vonta Hinton	So.	5-9 225
MLB	Dakota Allen	So.	6-2 225 ●
SLB	Malik Jenkins	Sr.	6-1 225 ●
CB	Justis Nelson	Sr.	6-2 180 ●
CB	Thierry Nguema	Sr.	5-10 175 ●
SS	Keenon Ward	Sr.	5-9 200 ●
FS	Jah'Shawn Johnson	So.	5-10 180 ●
P	Michael Barden	So.	5-10 175



SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.8 ● FPI CHANCE TEXAS TECH WINS

9/3 vs. Stephen F. Austin 99% ● 9/10 @ Arizona State 42% ● 9/17 vs. Louisiana Tech 87%
9/24 BYE ● 9/29 vs. Kansas 92% ● 10/8 @ Kansas State 52% ● 10/15 vs. West Virginia 36%
10/22 vs. Oklahoma 13% ● 10/29 @ TCU 29% ● 11/5 vs. Texas 42% ● 11/12 @ Oklahoma State 15%
11/19 @ Iowa State 58% ● 11/25 vs. Baylor [Arlington, Texas] 22%

8 Kansas State

COACH Bill Snyder (25th season)
193-101-1 (7-10 in bowl games)

Despite speculation that he might retire, Bill Snyder is back for his 25th season after somehow guiding Kansas State to a bowl game. With last year's two best QBs finally healthy, the Wildcats should be able to choose the best of four options. Loaded again defensively, they could be a Big 12 sleeper if they can find—and keep—the right game manager under center. —J.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Elijah Lee

The Wildcats have several proven performers coming back defensively, but Lee might be the most important. A second-team All-Big 12 selection last season, Lee is a versatile defender and tenacious pass rusher off the edge who led the team in tackles (80) and interceptions (three) last year. At 6-foot-3, 218 pounds, he has the length and athleticism to be a playmaking force.

X-FACTOR S Dante Barnett

The MVP and glue of K-State's defense two years ago, Barnett is back after missing virtually all of last season with a shoulder injury. Barnett, who has started 29 career games, has a nose for the ball, resulting in seven career interceptions. If he can rediscover his form of two seasons ago, K-State will have a chance to be far more opportunistic defensively after finishing tied for last in the Big 12 in 2015 with just five picks.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Injuries ravaged the Wildcats at quarterback last season, as both Jesse Ertz and Alex Delton were lost for the year with knee injuries before the start of conference play. Ertz initially won the job coming out of fall camp, and Snyder once compared Delton with former K-State great Eli Roberson. Ertz and Delton are healthy again and will challenge former walk-on Joe Hubener, who completed just 47.6 percent of his passes after being forced into the lineup last season. Freshman Skylar Thompson, a four-star recruit, is a wild card in the four-way battle.

THE PRESSER

Hubener, who had never started a game at QB, even in high school, became the starter by default. He lost the job late in the year to receiver-turned-QB Kody Cook, who is gone. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE K-STATE QBs?** "Snyder offenses have always excelled with second-year QBs. This year could be different, because the one that started last year due to injuries [Hubener] may not be the best QB to run what he wants to run. They may be faced with the dilemma of a year's worth of experience at that position versus going through the growing pains of another first-year guy." —Big 12 defensive coach

K-State topped the conference in time of possession. As a result, the Wildcats were able to keep explosive Big 12 offenses sidelined. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT K-STATE'S STYLE?** "When you get the football, it puts that much more pressure on you to get points. And they do such a great job, they're going to find a way to run the football. They're just really tough to play, especially on the road up there." —Big 12 offensive coach

Kickers Matthew McCrane and Nick Walsh and returner Dominique Heath are back on another vintage K-State special-teams unit. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR SPECIAL TEAMS?** "The thing I worry about when getting ready for Kansas State is their special-teams coach [Sean Snyder]. I'd hate to win on offense and win on defense, then have a big play or a big return win the game for them. That's what happened to West Virginia at the end of the year." —Big 12 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (3-6)
BOWL GAME AutoZone Liberty Bowl vs. Arkansas, 45-23 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Joe Hubener: 1,837 yards
RUSHING Charles Jones: 696 yards
RECEIVING Deante Burton: 510 yards
TACKLES Elijah Lee: 80
SACKS Jordan Willis: 9½
INTERCEPTIONS Elijah Lee: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Jesse Ertz	Jr.	6-3 205 ●
RB	Charles Jones	Sr.	5-10 206 ●
FB	Winston Dimel	So.	6-1 235 ●
WR	Byron Pringle	So.	6-2 212
WR	Deante Burton	Sr.	6-2 205 ●
TE	Dayton Valentine	So.	6-4 262
C	Dalton Risner	So.	6-5 300 ●
RG	Will Ash	Sr.	6-3 325
LG	Terrale Johnson	Sr.	6-1 303
RT	Abdul Beecham	So.	6-3 283
LT	Scott Frantz	RFr.	6-5 275
K	Matthew McCrane	Jr.	5-10 165
DEFENSE			
DE	Jordan Willis	Sr.	6-5 250 ●
DT	Will Geary	Jr.	6-0 297 ●
DT	Trey Dishon	RFr.	6-2 317
DE	Reggie Walker	RFr.	6-2 239
LB	Elijah Lee	Jr.	6-3 218 ●
LB	Will Davis	Sr.	6-0 224 ●
LB	Charmeachealle Moore	Sr.	6-0 221
CB	Duke Shelley	So.	5-9 160 ●
CB	Donnie Starks	Sr.	6-0 180 ●
SS	Dante Barnett	Sr.	6-1 193 ●
FS	Kendall Adams	So.	6-1 213
P	Nick Walsh	Jr.	5-11 212 ●



Lee was the only Big 12 player who had at least five sacks and three picks last season.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.9 ● FPI CHANCE KANSAS STATE WINS

9/2 @ Stanford 13% ● 9/10 BYE ● 9/17 vs. Florida Atlantic 91% ● 9/24 vs. Missouri State 99%
10/1 @ West Virginia 16% ● 10/8 vs. Texas Tech 49% ● 10/15 @ Oklahoma 5%
10/22 vs. Texas 34% ● 10/29 @ Iowa State 46% ● 11/5 vs. Oklahoma State 19%
11/12 BYE ● 11/19 @ Baylor 14% ● 11/26 vs. Kansas 88% ● 12/3 @ TCU 21%

9 Iowa State

COACH Matt Campbell (1st season)

The Cyclones turned to Toledo's Matt Campbell after Paul Rhoads failed to reach a bowl game for the third straight season. Much like the 36-year-old Campbell—the youngest coach at a Power 5 school—Iowa State has potential, most notably running back Mike Warren, last season's Big 12 offensive freshman of the year. Now it's time to turn that promise into progress. —J.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Mike Warren

Warren emerged as one of the top running backs in the league last season, finishing fourth in the Big 12 with 1,339 rushing yards despite getting just nine carries in the first two games. The new coaching regime is very familiar with Warren, and not just because he gained 126 yards when the Cyclones faced Toledo last September. Warren originally committed to Campbell and Toledo out of high school before later flipping to Iowa State.

● X-FACTOR DB Kamari Cotton-Moya

In 2014, Cotton-Moya was the Big 12 defensive freshman of the year. Last season, however, he missed Iowa State's final six games with a hamstring injury after registering 40 tackles in the first six games. If he remains healthy, the Cyclones could feature one of the top defensive backfields in the Big 12, with proven cornerbacks Nigel Tribune, Jomal Wiltz and Brian Peavy flanking him.

● POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

Up front, the Cyclones return left tackle Jake Campos, who has made 23 career starts. But elsewhere on the offensive line, Iowa State will be starting from scratch. Standout guard Daniel Burton left the program because of injuries, and Rhode Island graduate transfer Tyler Catalina backed out of his Iowa State commitment to enroll at Georgia instead. Those twists could open the door for the gem of Campbell's first recruiting class, Sean Foster, a 6-foot-8, 285-pound four-star recruit at offensive tackle, to challenge for the spot opposite Campos immediately.

THE PRESSER

● The Cyclones have not escaped the bottom three in the Big 12 in scoring since 2005. Last year Toledo averaged 35 ppg, 10 more than Iowa State averaged. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEW STAFF?** "With Matt's background and what he did at Toledo, that will help. In this day and age in the Big 12, you've got to be able to score and you've got to be able to keep up. That's the path they're taking. I think that will help them." —Big 12 head coach

● After taking over for Sam B. Richardson at quarterback in late October, Joel Lanning ranked fifth in the Big 12 in QBR for the remainder of the regular season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LANNING?** "He's big, athletic and played his tail off. I couldn't have been more impressed watching him those last couple of games. As the year went on, it looked like he threw the ball better and they trusted him. If his development continues with the videoouts they have coming back, that's a good-looking offense." —Big 12 head coach

● Warren, Iowa State's first Big 12 offensive freshman of the year, torched rivals with five 100-yard games in conference play. Despite gaining 2,512 yards as a senior at Oklahoma's Lawton High, he got no other Big 12 offers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WARREN?** "Warren had one of the most impressive seasons among Big 12 backs. After the changes and injuries that Iowa State faced last year, he consistently performed. A number of Big 12 schools screwed up in letting him sign that far north." —Big 12 defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (2-7)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Sam B. Richardson: 1,443 yards

RUSHING Mike Warren: 1,339 yards

RECEIVING Allen Lazard: 808 yards

TACKLES Brian Peavy: 82

SACKS Dale Pierson: 8½

INTERCEPTIONS Brian Peavy: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Joel Lanning	Jr. 6-2 232 ●
RB	Mike Warren	So. 6-0 200 ●
WR	Allen Lazard	Jr. 6-5 223 ●
WR	Dondre Daley	Sr. 6-2 191
WR	Jauan Wesley	Jr. 5-11 181 ●
TE	Clifford Fernandez	Jr. 6-3 255
C	Julian Good-Jones	RFr. 6-5 270
RG	Patrick Scoggins	Sr. 6-1 293
LG	Nick Fett	Sr. 6-7 313
RT	Jake Campos	Jr. 6-8 297 ●
LT	Jaypee Philbert Jr.	Jr. 6-5 314
K	Cole Netten	Sr. 6-1 224 ●

DEFENSE

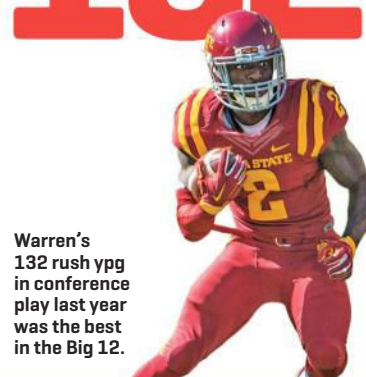
DE	J.D. Waggoner	Jr. 6-3 250 ●
DT	Diamond Tucker	Sr. 6-0 296 ●
DT	Pierre Aka	Sr. 6-4 293
DE	Gabe Luna	Sr. 6-2 243
WLB	Willie Harvey	So. 6-0 222 ●
MLB	Kane Seeley	Sr. 6-2 239
SLB	D'Andre Payne	So. 5-10 186 ●
CB	Brian Peavy	So. 5-9 184 ●
CB	Jomal Wiltz	Sr. 5-10 174 ●
SS	Kamari Cotton-Moya	Jr. 6-1 197 ●
FS	Mike Johnson	RFr. 5-11 182 ●
P	Colin Downing	Jr. 5-11 187 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.2 ● FPI CHANCE IOWA STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Northern Iowa **78%** ● **9/10** @ Iowa **21%** ● **9/17** @ TCU **16%**
9/24 vs. San Jose State **65%** ● **10/1** vs. Baylor **18%** ● **10/8** @ Oklahoma State **8%**
10/15 @ Texas **15%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Kansas State **54%** ● **11/3** vs. Oklahoma **7%**
11/12 @ Kansas **74%** ● **11/19** vs. Texas Tech **43%** ● **11/26** vs. West Virginia **24%**

132



Warren's 132 rush ypg in conference play last year was the best in the Big 12.

LUKE LUJAP IMAGES

10 Kansas

COACH David Beaty [2nd season]
0-12 [0-0 in bowl games]

All the old clichés—it's a rebuilding year, the cupboard is bare, just wait until he has his own guys—don't even begin to describe the situation for second-year Kansas coach David Beaty. The 2015 Jayhawks had 33 first-time starters, 10 of them freshmen, and lost their top two QBs to injuries. And yet there's hope for a win. As the saying goes: If you can't beat 'em, schedule Rhode Island. —B.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON The losing streaks

At Kansas, there is no avoiding two bleak reminders of futility. After an 0-12 season, the Jayhawks have now lost 15 straight games and 20 of their last 21, and they were hammered in nine conference games last year by an average score of 48-12. Hold up, now. Circle Sept. 3 on your calendars! The Jayhawks open the season hosting Rhode Island, an FCS team that went 1-10 last year. But fear not, fans of schadenfreude: If the Jayhawks win that one, the road streak will still be intact. Kansas hasn't won a game away from Memorial Stadium since it beat UTEP on Sept. 12, 2009—a string of 38 losses.

● X-FACTOR WR LaQuvionte Gonzalez

The junior receiver, a 5-foot-10, 176-pound transfer from Texas A&M with 4.4 speed and a 41-inch vertical, could provide a big-play threat. Beaty was his position coach at A&M and promises to get creative with Gonzalez to get him the ball in as many ways as possible. In 16 games with the Aggies, he had 26 catches for 317 yards and two touchdowns.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Ryan Willis flashed some promise, throwing for a Kansas freshman record 1,719 yards and nine touchdowns. But he also threw 10 picks, was sacked 3.1 times per game (most in the Big 12) and completed just 52.1 percent of his passes. Redshirt freshman Carter Stanley will also get a shot at the job, and senior Montell Cozart returns with 11 career starts, including last year's first four games before a shoulder injury ended his season.

THE PRESSER

● Beaty's winless debut wasn't a surprise, but it also couldn't have gone much worse, beginning with dropping a 41-38 heartbreaker to FCS South Dakota State in the season opener. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF THE KANSAS PROGRAM?** "He took over a disaster, but I think he did a good job. They'll get some guys, but it's going to take a long time. They have to give him some time. He's going to need about eight years to get that program right. And it's not easy up there." —Big 12 head coach

● The Jayhawks can be an unexpected test in Lawrence, despite a 2-20 Big 12 home record over the past five years. Baylor, TCU, Texas and Oklahoma State have all barely escaped with single-digit wins. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE JAYHAWKS ON THE ROAD?** "They're spooky. Unless you're Texas, Oklahoma or Baylor and you can go up there and overwhelm them athletically, you kind of have to watch it with them. You can go up there, they'll have like 20,000 in the stands and they can get you." —Big 12 head coach

● Kansas nearly pulled the upset of the year, falling at TCU 23-17 in mid-November. The Jayhawks' tightest conference loss was a sign Beaty has his young players buying into his energetic approach. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW IT'S EVEN POSSIBLE TO TURN THIS THING AROUND?** "First you find guys who want to be there. Then you recruit, recruit, recruit, with an eye on competing in Year 3 or 4. You have to teach them to compete. Teach them how to win." —Big 12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 0-12 [0-9]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Ryan Willis: 1,719 yards

RUSHING Ke'aun Kinner: 566 yards

RECEIVING Tre' Parmalee: 599 yards

TACKLES Fish Smithson: 111

SACKS Ben Goodman: 5½

INTERCEPTIONS Fish Smithson: 2

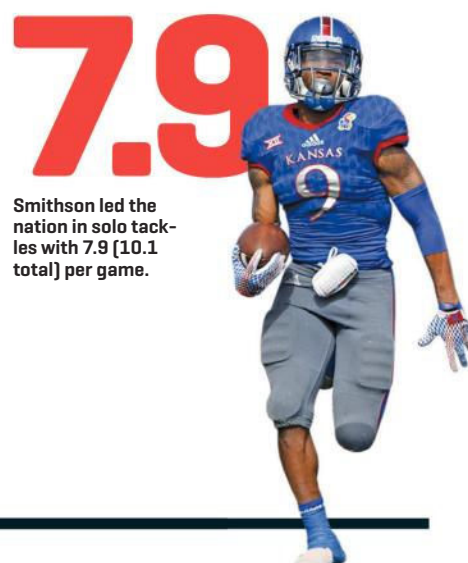
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Ryan Willis	So. 6-4 211 ●
RB	Ke'aun Kinner	Sr. 5-9 191 ●
WR	Steven Sims Jr.	So. 5-10 176 ●
WR	Tyler Patrick	So. 6-0 177 ●
WR	LaQuvionte Gonzalez	Jr. 5-10 176 ●
TE	Ben Johnson	Jr. 6-5 245 ●
C	Joe Gibson	Jr. 6-3 310 ●
RG	D'Andre Banks	Sr. 6-3 310 ●
LG	Jacob Bragg	So. 6-4 291 ●
RT	Larry Hughes	So. 6-7 309 ●
LT	Jordan Shelley-Smith	Sr. 6-5 302 ●
K	Nick Bartolotta	Jr. 5-6 189 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Dorance Armstrong Jr.	So. 6-4 241 ●
NT	Isi Holani	Jr. 6-3 325 ●
DT	Daniel Wise	So. 6-3 290 ●
DE	Anthony Olobia	Sr. 6-5 247 ●
LB	Joe Dineen Jr.	Jr. 6-2 225 ●
LB	Marcquis Roberts	Sr. 6-1 223 ●
NB	Tevin Shaw	Sr. 5-11 206 ●
CB	Marnez Ogletree	Sr. 5-10 190 ●
CB	Brandon Stewart	Sr. 6-0 178 ●
SS	Tyrone Miller Jr.	So. 6-0 182 ●
FS	Fish Smithson	Sr. 5-11 201 ●
P	Quinton Conaway	Fr. 6-1 207 ●



Smithson led the nation in solo tackles with 7.9 (10.1 total) per game.

SCHEDULE

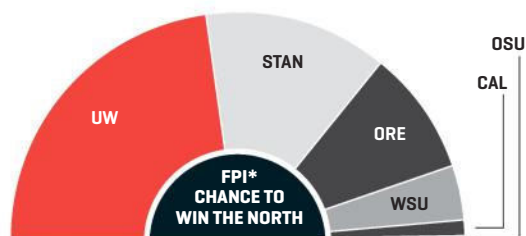
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.5 ● FPI CHANCE KANSAS WINS

9/3 vs. Rhode Island 97% ● 9/10 vs. Ohio 57% ● 9/17 @ Memphis 21%
9/24 BYE ● 9/29 @ Texas Tech 8% ● 10/8 vs. TCU 10% ● 10/15 @ Baylor 2%
10/22 vs. Oklahoma State 4% ● 10/29 @ Oklahoma 1% ● 11/5 @ West Virginia 4%
11/12 vs. Iowa State 26% ● 11/19 vs. Texas 9% ● 11/26 @ Kansas State 12%

FPI 14

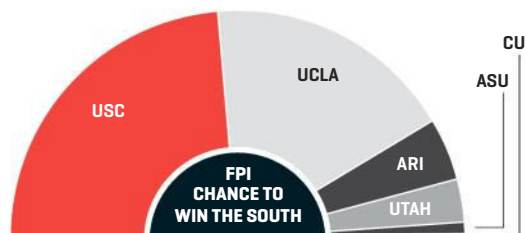
Pac-12 outlook

NORTH	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WASHINGTON	13	45.8%
STANFORD	18	26.1%
OREGON	28	17.6%
WASHINGTON STATE	41	7.9%
CALIFORNIA	49	2.4%
OREGON STATE	72	0.3%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

SOUTH	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
USC	8	47.4%
UCLA	19	35.5%
ARIZONA	32	9.3%
UTAH	37	6.1%
ARIZONA STATE	47	1.3%
COLORADO	59	0.5%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
35.3

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
30%
USC

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB **Christian McCaffrey** Jr. Stanford

ALL-PAC-12

QB	Josh Rosen	So.	UCLA
RB	Christian McCaffrey	Jr.	Stanford
RB	Royce Freeman	Jr.	Oregon
WR	JuJu Smith-Schuster	Jr.	USC
WR	Gabe Marks	Sr.	Washington State
TE	Dalton Schultz	Jr.	Stanford
OL	Zach Banner	Sr.	USC
OL	Conor McDermott	Sr.	UCLA
OL	Damien Mama	Jr.	USC
OL	Chris Borrayo	Sr.	California
OL	Riley Sorenson	Sr.	Washington State

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

S **Budda Baker** Jr. Washington

ALL-PAC-12

DL	Eddie Vanderdoes	Jr.	UCLA
DL	Lowell Lotulelei	Jr.	Utah
DL	Elijah Qualls	Jr.	Washington
DL	Hunter Dimick	Sr.	Utah
LB	Azeem Victor	Jr.	Washington
LB	Cameron Smith	So.	USC
LB	Salamo Fiso	Sr.	Arizona State
CB	Sidney Jones	Jr.	Washington
CB	Adoree' Jackson	Jr.	USC
S	Budda Baker	Jr.	Washington
S	Marcus Williams	Jr.	Utah

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	Aidan Schneider	Jr.	Oregon
P	Matt Haack	Sr.	Arizona State
RS	Dante Pettis	Jr.	Washington

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

9/3 USC vs. Alabama [94*]

9/17 USC @ Stanford [87]

9/30 Stanford @ Washington [83]

OCTOBER

10/8 Washington @ Oregon [80]

10/15 Stanford @ Notre Dame [83]

10/15 USC @ Arizona [82]

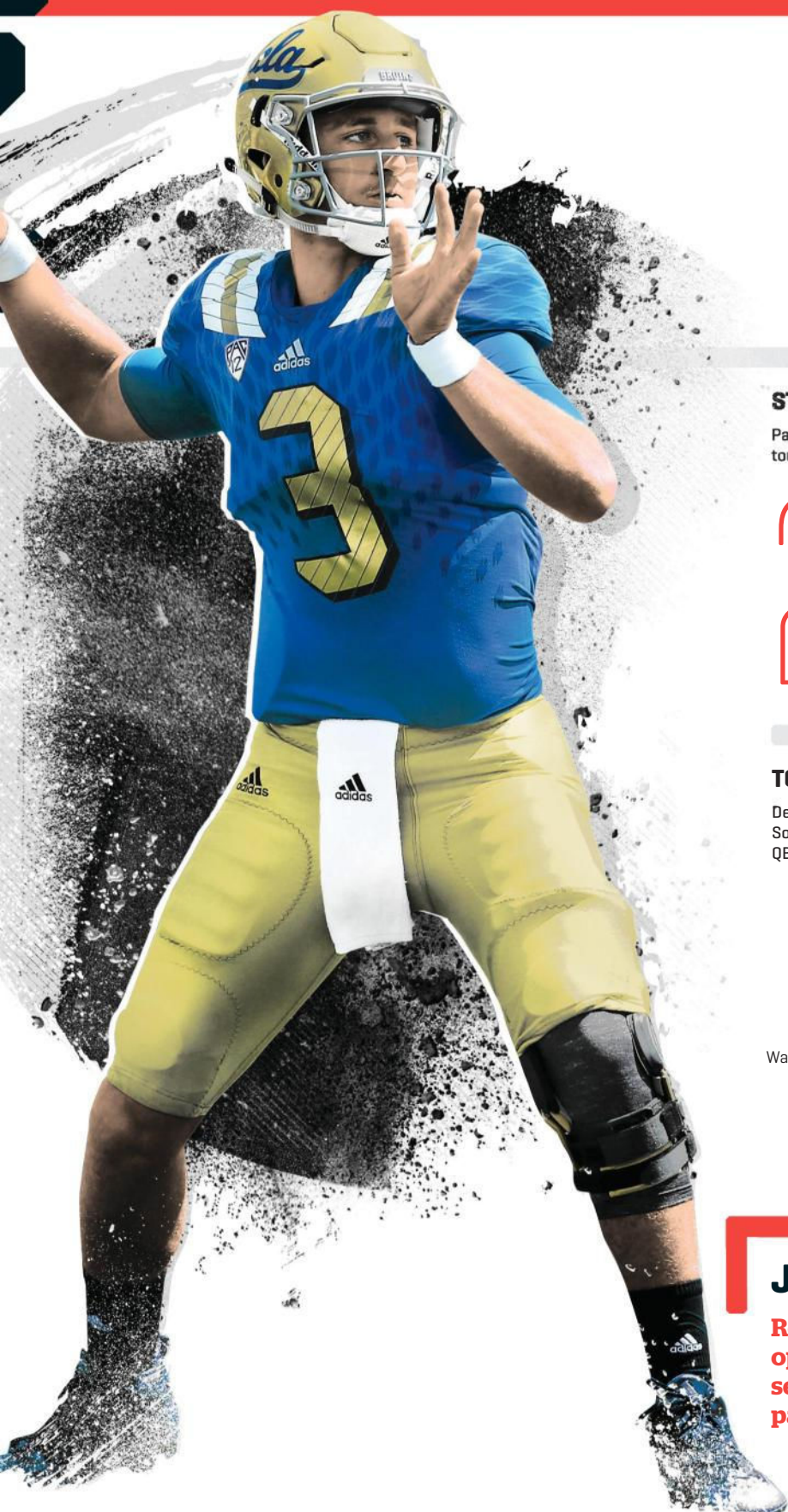
NOVEMBER

11/12 USC @ Washington [89]

11/19 USC @ UCLA [87]

11/26 Notre Dame @ USC [86]

*Matchup quality [0-100 scale] rates games based on team strength [FPI] and how close the contest is expected to be.



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

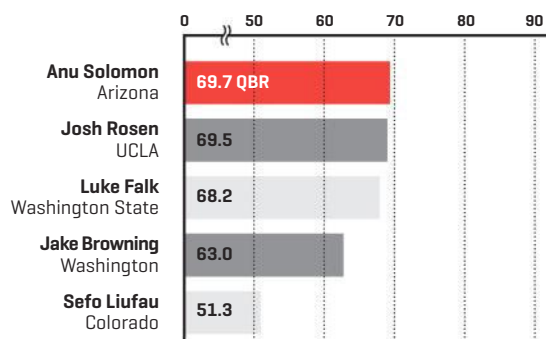
Pac-12 teams have three of the 10 toughest slates, including USC at No. 1.

22

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Despite a bit of a sophomore slump, Solomon still sets the pace for Pac-12 QBs, but there's not much of a gap.



Josh Rosen

Rosen, the first UCLA freshman to open a season as the starting QB, set a school record with 245 straight passes without an interception.

1 Washington

COACH Chris Petersen (3rd season)
15-12 (1-1 in bowl games)

Is this the year the Huskies leap Oregon and Stanford for the Pac-12 title? Last season, with true freshmen at quarterback, running back and left tackle, UW lost six games by an average of just 8.8 points. The youth movement should pay off with 16 starters back, including seven from the Pac-12's best defense, which gave up 4.9 yards per play and 18.8 ppg. —Chantel Jennings

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 (4-5)
BOWL GAME Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl vs. Southern Mississippi, 44-31 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Jake Browning: 2,955 yards
RUSHING Myles Gaskin: 1,302 yards
RECEIVING Jaydon Mickens: 692 yards
TACKLES Azeem Victor: 95
SACKS Travis Feeney: 8
INTERCEPTIONS Sidney Jones: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON FS Budda Baker

The numbers show that Baker has started every game but one the past two seasons, made 111 career tackles and grabbed three interceptions. But his stats don't tell the whole story. After an impressive freshman season (75 tackles, one interception, two forced fumbles), offensive coordinators learned to avoid him. As a result, teammates accounted for more picks: Sidney Jones and Kevin King combined for seven last year, up from three in 2014. The secondary's returning depth (only one player, Brian Clay, is gone from last year's two-deep) will make it tough for QBs to simply avoid Baker.

● X-FACTOR LT Trey Adams

A 6-foot-8, 306-pound sophomore, Adams is tasked with protecting QB Jake Browning's blind side a year after the Huskies gave up 33 sacks (seventh in the Pac-12). But the line should be more formidable, as Adams, who started nine games before missing the final two with a shoulder injury, is joined by four other returning starters on the line.

● POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

Browning loses three of his four top pass catchers, including Jaydon Mickens (58 receptions, 692 yards, two touchdowns) and tight end Joshua Perkins (36-539-3). Dante Pettis (30 catches) and Brayden Lenius, a tough matchup at 6-5, 228 pounds, should be bigger contributors. The return of John Ross, who was out last season with a knee injury, also helps. He had 371 yards and four TDs in 2014.

THE PRESSER

● RB Myles Gaskin rushed for 1,302 yards, becoming Washington's first true freshman with more than 1,000 rushing yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY HE'S SO HARD TO STOP?** "He's just great in short areas and quick as a frickin' hiccup. His feet are unbelievable. His ability to make people miss is special. I'm just thinking of some plays against him and I'm like, 'How in the heck did he get out of that?' He's so fast and decisive and powerful." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Browning became the first true freshman QB to start for Petersen in his 10-year career. By the end of the season he was very steady. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY YOU BELIEVE HE'LL CONTINUE THAT GROWTH?** "You saw his improvement over the course of the year. Young guys get better, but not every young guy gets better over the course of his first year like he did. A lot of times it's Year 1 to Year 2, maybe, but you saw marked improvement. He does really well in their system." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Baker's versatility when roaming a Huskies defense that forced 27 turnovers last season (tied for 13th nationally) is a nightmare for offenses. Baker was named to the All-Pac-12 first team. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT MAKES HIM SO DANGEROUS?** "He can do it all. He's very athletic, instinctive and physical, which are the three biggest things that make a DB great. He's relentless running to the ball. He tries to get every ball every play, and he has a feel for where the ball is going." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Jake Browning	So.	6-2 205 ●
RB	Myles Gaskin	So.	5-10 193 ●
WR	Dante Pettis	Jr.	6-1 187 ●
WR	John Ross	Jr.	5-11 196 ●
TE	Darrell Daniels	Sr.	6-4 237 ●
TE	Drew Sample	So.	6-5 260 ●
C	Coleman Shelton	Jr.	6-4 292 ●
RG	Jesse Sosebee	So.	6-5 314 ●
LG	Jake Eldrenkamp	Sr.	6-5 284 ●
RT	Kaleb McGary	So.	6-7 300 ●
LT	Trey Adams	So.	6-8 306 ●
K	Cameron Van Winkle	Sr.	5-10 189 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Jaylen Johnson	So.	6-3 285 ●
NT	Greg Gaines	So.	6-2 318 ●
DT	Elijah Qualls	Jr.	6-1 321 ●
OLB	Joe Mathis	Sr.	6-2 256 ●
WLB	Keishawn Bierria	Jr.	6-1 226 ●
MLB	Azeem Victor	Jr.	6-3 227 ●
NB	Darren Gardenhire	Jr.	5-11 187 ●
CB	Kevin King	Sr.	6-3 190 ●
CB	Sidney Jones	Jr.	6-0 180 ●
SS	JoJo McIntosh	So.	6-1 208 ●
FS	Budda Baker	Jr.	5-10 184 ●
P	Van Soderberg	Fr.	5-11 199 ●

5

Baker had five pass breakups on throws of 15 or more yards, tied for third in the Pac-12.



CHRISTOPHER MAST/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.2 ● FPI CHANCE WASHINGTON WINS

9/3 vs. Rutgers 93% ● 9/10 vs. Idaho 98% ● 9/17 vs. Portland State 99%
9/24 @ Arizona 57% ● 9/30 vs. Stanford 64% ● 10/8 @ Oregon 57%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Oregon State 93% ● 10/29 @ Utah 63% ● 11/5 @ California 72%
11/12 vs. USC 52% ● 11/19 vs. Arizona State 85% ● 11/25 @ Washington State 68%

2 Stanford

COACH David Shaw [6th season]
54-14 [3-2 in bowl games]

The Cardinal bookended 2015 with a lethargic Big Ten loss (Northwestern) and an emphatic Big Ten victory (Iowa) en route to a No. 3 finish in the polls. In 2016, Stanford should again be in the mix for a Pac-12 crown and a national title. Yes, it lost a fixture at QB and a few key faces on defense—but it still holds the ultimate trump card. Looking at you, Christian McCaffrey. —C.J.

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● ALL EYES ON RB Christian McCaffrey

The do-it-all 2015 Heisman runner-up returns to Stanford ... and no one is happy to see him again except his own team. McCaffrey set the NCAA single-season record for all-purpose yards (3,864) and was the only FBS player to lead his team in rushing *and* receiving last year. The junior is also a dangerous return man—he brought back a punt and a kickoff for TDs last year. McCaffrey eludes defenders on the ground, with 47 percent of his rushes going for 5-plus yards in 2015, the best rate of any top-10 back. With upheaval elsewhere [QB, WR], expect David Shaw to call his number even more.

● X-FACTOR The offensive line

The Cardinal often reload, rather than rebuild, in the trenches. But they're looking for a new left tackle, left guard and center, so there has to be some worry that a line that gave up only 20 sacks in 2015 [No. 3 in the Pac-12] and paved the way for 223.7 rush ypg [No. 2] might take its lumps, at least early on. McCaffrey is likely capable of masking that inexperience. But asking a new, unproven quarterback to do the same might prove dicey.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Four-year starter Kevin Hogan didn't cede a lot of playing time [951 of 1,010 pass attempts since '13], so potential replacements Keller Chryst and Ryan Burns are still unknowns. They have similar frames and measurables—at 6-foot-5, they're both a hair taller than Hogan—and similar inexperience, with four and six career game appearances, respectively.

THE PRESSER

● The Cardinal's new quarterback has one of the nation's best safety nets in McCaffrey but no go-to weapon at receiver. Stanford's leading WR, Michael Rector, returns, but he fell short of 600 yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER McCAFFREY CAN CARRY THE OFFENSE ON HIS OWN?** "Probably. When you watch his film, you think, 'He can't be that good.' And I have a feeling Iowa said, 'He can't be that good.' And then you play him and you realize he is that good. He's the one guy who we designed a coverage for, and we don't design coverages for everybody." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Rather than dip into the transfer pool, Shaw prefers to groom QBs, allowing them to study under a starter for a few years before taking over. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THAT WILL BENEFIT CHRYST AND BURNS IN 2016?** "They're going to know the system, and when that's in place it's easy to put yourself in a situation where you can coach up a kid—especially if he has had the mental reps—to continue being successful." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Although the Cardinal lost two critical players in the secondary, a host of younger DBs gained valuable reps last season, their first year on the field, including Aljah Holder and Quenton Meeks [18 combined starts]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSIVE BACKFIELD WILL BE AN ASSET NEXT SEASON?** "They play a lot of guys, probably more than any team in our league. Those guys rotate corners. They'll play like eight or nine DBs, so that develops depth." —Pac-12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12-2 [8-1]

BOWL GAME Rose Bowl Game Presented by Northwestern Mutual vs. Iowa, 45-16 W

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Kevin Hogan: 2,867 yards

RUSHING Christian McCaffrey: 2,019 yards

RECEIVING Christian McCaffrey: 645 yards

TACKLES Blake Martinez: 141

SACKS Brennan Scarlett: 5½

INTERCEPTIONS Quenton Meeks: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Keller Chryst	So.	6-5 237
RB	Christian McCaffrey	Jr.	6-0 202 ●
TE	Greg Taboada	Jr.	6-5 250
WR	Francis Owusu	Sr.	6-3 223
WR	Michael Rector	Sr.	6-1 185 ●
TE	Dalton Schultz	So.	6-6 240 ●
C	Jesse Burkett	So.	6-4 304
RG	Johnny Caspers	Sr.	6-4 296 ●
LG	Brandon Fanaika	So.	6-3 318
RT	Casey Tucker	Jr.	6-6 296 ●
LT	David Bright	Sr.	6-5 301
K	Conrad Ukropina	Sr.	6-1 192 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Luke Kaumatule	Sr.	6-7 294
NT	Harrison Phillips	So.	6-4 290
DE	Solomon Thomas	So.	6-3 275 ●
OLB	Peter Kalambayi	Jr.	6-3 245 ●
ILB	Jordan Perez	So.	6-2 223
ILB	Kevin Palma	Jr.	6-2 250 ●
OLB	Joey Alfieri	So.	6-3 240
CB	Aljah Holder	So.	6-2 185 ●
CB	Quenton Meeks	So.	6-2 195 ●
SS	Dallas Lloyd	Sr.	6-3 213 ●
FS	Zach Hoffpauir	Sr.	6-0 197
P	Alex Robinson	Jr.	6-0 216 ●

300



McCaffrey had six games of 300-plus all-purpose yards, four more than any other player.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.8 ● FPI CHANCE STANFORD WINS

9/2 vs. Kansas State **87%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** vs. USC **49%** ● **9/24** @ UCLA **42%**
9/30 @ Washington **36%** ● **10/8** vs. Washington State **78%** ● **10/15** @ Notre Dame **33%**
10/22 vs. Colorado **88%** ● **10/29** @ Arizona **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Oregon State **90%**
11/12 @ Oregon **51%** ● **11/19** @ California **70%** ● **11/26** vs. Rice **98%**

3 Oregon

COACH Mark Helfrich [4th season]
33-8 [2-2 in bowl games]

Last year the Ducks went with a high-risk, high-reward FCS transfer at QB (Vernon Adams Jr.), and it worked so well they're doing it again with Dakota Prukop. They have two new coordinators—Matt Lubick on offense and Brady Hoke on defense—but there's talent everywhere. Oregon could return to national prominence if Hoke can patch a defense that gave up 37.5 points per game. —C.J.

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● **ALL EYES ON QB Dakota Prukop**
Nick Saban and Jim Harbaugh both courted the graduate transfer from Montana State, who played in a variation of Chip Kelly's offense, giving him a head start on the Oregon system. Prukop excelled in it, throwing for 3,025 yards and 28 touchdowns and rushing for 797 yards and 11 TDs. The Ducks return six of their top seven pass catchers from a season ago, including stud running back Royce Freeman, so Prukop will be surrounded by help. After Adams threw for 2,643 yards and 26 TDs with just 6 INTs in his one season after transferring from Eastern Washington, Oregon has high hopes for Round 2.

● **X-FACTOR QB coach David Yost**
Yost came to Eugene via Washington State, where he coached wide receivers in a very different offense. But he has worked with talented quarterbacks before. At Missouri, Yost coached Brad Smith, Chase Daniel and Blaine Gabbert. He must groom Prukop while simultaneously learning the offense.

● **POSITION BATTLE Defensive line**
Hoke is moving the Ducks from a 3-4 to a 4-3, overhauling a defense that allowed 6 yards per play, ranked 125th against the pass [307 yards per game] and lost a 31-point lead in the Alamo Bowl. Hoke is moving linebackers up and converting offensive linemen in search of a fourth starter, but he's done this before. In 2011, he installed a four-man front at Michigan, and the Wolverines improved from 35.2 points per game in 2010 to 17.4, with sacks rising from 18 to 30.

THE PRESSER

● Freeman rushed for 1,836 yards during his sophomore campaign, averaging 6.5 yards per carry. Just 12 percent of his 283 runs last season were stopped behind the line of scrimmage, best among the nation's top 10 backs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY FREEMAN IS SO HARD TO STOP?** "How do you tackle him? I don't know. It's almost impossible to tackle that guy unless you gang-tackle him because he keeps his legs moving. For as big as he is [5-11, 230 pounds], he's such a patient runner. He lets things develop. He's powerful, but he doesn't just say, 'Hey, I'll lower the boom.' He kind of feels his way in and out of traffic." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Prukop has more game experience [22 starts] than any other Oregon QB, but adjusting to coaches is always a wild card. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PRUKOP'S LEARNING CURVE?** "One year in the system is never as good as the third year in the system. Regardless of skill set, regardless of talent level, it's very difficult in a year's time to master an offense." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Oregon has used Charles Nelson on offense [115 yards rushing, 270 receiving], defense [47 tackles, 2 INTs] and special teams [33 kick returns]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY HE'S ABLE TO IMPACT GAMES?** "What separates him from others is just his physical toughness. It's very rare for a receiver or DB, or whatever you call him, to go out and be their best tackler. He can be extremely physical, but then he's also very good with the ball in his hands." —Pac-12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 [7-2]
BOWL GAME Valero Alamo Bowl
vs. TCU, 47-41 L [30T]
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Vernon Adams Jr.: 2,643 yards
RUSHING Royce Freeman: 1,836 yards
RECEIVING Bralon Addison: 804 yards
TACKLES Joe Walker: 87
SACKS DeForest Buckner: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS Tyree Robinson: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Dakota Prukop	Sr.	6-2 200
RB	Royce Freeman	Jr.	5-11 230 ●
RB	Taj Griffin	So.	5-10 175
WR	Dwayne Stanford	Sr.	6-5 205 ●
WR	Darren Carrington	Jr.	6-2 195 ●
TE	Evan Baylis	Sr.	6-6 250 ●
C	Jake Hanson	RFr.	6-5 288
RG	Doug Brenner	Jr.	6-2 305
LG	Evan Voeller	Jr.	6-5 295
RT	Cameron Hunt	Sr.	6-4 295 ●
LT	Tyrell Crosby	Jr.	6-5 310 ●
K	Aidan Schneider	Jr.	6-4 235 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Henry Mondeaux	Jr.	6-5 280 ●
DT	Austin Maloata	Jr.	6-1 305
DT	Canton Kaumatule	So.	6-7 295
DE	Torrodne Prevot	Sr.	6-3 225
LB	Johnny Ragin III	Sr.	6-3 225
LB	A.J. Hotchkins	Jr.	5-11 230
LB	Jimmie Swain	Jr.	6-3 235
CB	Arrion Springs	Jr.	5-11 205 ●
CB	Tyree Robinson	Jr.	6-4 205 ●
SS	Reggie Daniels	Sr.	6-1 205 ●
FS	Juwaan Williams	Jr.	6-0 195 ●
P	Ian Wheeler	Jr.	6-0 205 ●



Freeman rushed for at least 100 yards in the final nine games, the longest such active streak.

RICK SCUTER/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE OREGON WINS

9/3 vs. UC Davis 99% ● 9/10 vs. Virginia 86% ● 9/17 @ Nebraska 36%
9/24 vs. Colorado 83% ● 10/1 @ Washington State 49% ● 10/8 vs. Washington 43%
10/15 BYE ● 10/21 @ California 60% ● 10/29 vs. Arizona State 77% ● 11/5 @ USC 20%
11/12 vs. Stanford 49% ● 11/19 @ Utah 47% ● 11/26 @ Oregon State 76%

4 Washington State

COACH Mike Leach (5th season)
21-29 (1-1 in bowl games)

Mike Leach had a breakthrough in 2015, refueling his revival in Pullman by winning nine games, including huge triumphs over Oregon, Arizona State and UCLA. The offense will again be a force with Luke Falk, who led the nation in passing yards per game, and Gabe Marks, who led the conference in receptions. But Wazzu has also made big defensive strides. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 (6-3)
BOWL GAME Hyundai Sun Bowl
vs. Miami (Fla.), 20-14 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Luke Falk: **4,566 yards**
RUSHING Gerard Wicks: **610 yards**
RECEIVING Gabe Marks: **1,192 yards**
TACKLES Peyton Pelluer: **101**
SACKS Hercules Mata'afa: **7**
INTERCEPTIONS Shalom Luani: **4**

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ALL EYES ON WR Gabe Marks

After leading the conference with eight receptions per game (best in the Power 5), Marks returns for his senior year to wreak havoc on defenses. He caught 104 passes for 1,192 yards and scored 15 touchdowns (fourth in the nation) last season, which set a Washington State record. He has big-play ability—64 percent of his catches went for first downs or touchdowns—and he caught a game-winning TD pass with three seconds left against UCLA. He already owns the WSU school record for career receptions with 227.

X-FACTOR Running backs

The Cougars have the backfield to provide a twist to Leach's air raid attack. Gerard Wicks (107 carries, 610 rushing yards), Jamal Morrow (53-347) and Keith Harrington (37-234) all return, with Wicks providing a big-gain threat: 22 of his carries went for at least 10 yards. Redshirt freshman James Williams has drawn praise from coaches in practice and could also add firepower.

POSITION BATTLE Left tackle

The Cougars averaged 3.6 yards per rush last season, the best rushing rate of Leach's tenure. But now Washington State needs to replace Joe Dahl and his 34 career starts. Andre Dillard (who appeared in two games) and Cody O'Connell (12 games on special teams) will battle for the job, and Leach will be paying close attention. The Cougars allowed 41 sacks, and Falk suffered a concussion against Colorado and missed the Apple Cup at Washington.

THE PRESSER

Falk, a former walk-on, threw for 4,566 yards with 38 TDs and 8 INTs, completing 69.5 percent of his passes and leading the nation with 380.5 ypg. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY FALK IS SO EFFECTIVE?** "He's in a great system where they put a lot of stuff on the quarterback. They give him a lot of decisions at the line of scrimmage. He does a great job of understanding defenses and where to go with the ball. I think he's talented. But the mental aspect—that has made him such a good player." —Pac-12 offensive coach

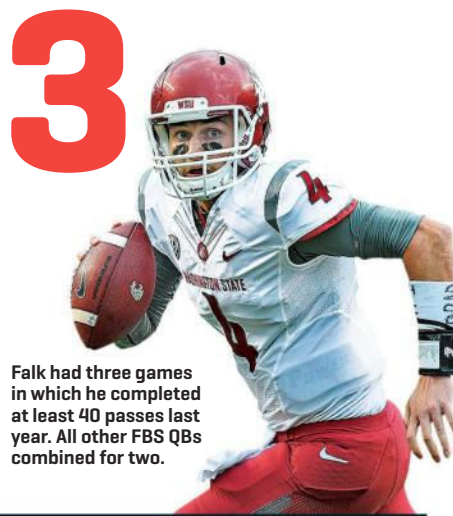
In Alex Grinch's first year as defensive coordinator, WSU improved from allowing 38.6 ppg in 2014 to just 27.7, and the number of TD passes allowed fell from 33 to 13. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT GRINCH'S BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION IS?** "[They're] similar to Washington, where they made you earn every yard. The biggest difference I noticed is that they did a much better job of not giving up the big play." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Last season the Cougars averaged 80.1 rushing yards per game, which was almost three times what they averaged during Leach's first year in the Pac-12. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY LEACH'S OFFENSE IS SUCH A CHALLENGE?** "There's a lot of answers built into the system and built into each play. When you take one thing away, there's something else that's there, and their quarterback is able to recognize that and go to it. When they go to a second or third choice, the guy makes the play and then he gets some extra yards." —Pac-12 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Luke Falk	Jr.	6-4 205 ●
RB	Gerard Wicks	Jr.	6-0 224 ●
WR	Isaiah Johnson	Fr.	6-3 211
WR	Gabe Marks	Sr.	6-0 190 ●
WR	River Cracraft	Sr.	6-0 200 ●
WR	Robert Lewis	Jr.	5-9 170 ●
C	Riley Sorenson	Sr.	6-4 319 ●
RG	Eduardo Middleton	Sr.	6-5 310 ●
LG	Cody O'Connell	Jr.	6-8 346
RT	Cole Madison	Jr.	6-5 303 ●
LT	Andre Dillard	So.	6-5 270
K	Erik Powell	Jr.	6-1 193 ●

DEFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
DE	Hercules Mata'afa	So.	6-2 242
DT	Robert Barber	Sr.	6-3 307 ●
DT	Garrett McBroom	Jr.	6-3 276
OLB	Logan Tago	So.	6-3 240
WLB	Suliasi Tamaivena	Jr.	6-2 225
MLB	Peyton Pelluer	Jr.	6-0 227 ●
NB	Parker Henry	Sr.	5-11 207 ●
CB	Marcellus Pippins	Jr.	5-10 170 ●
CB	Darrien Molton	So.	5-10 170 ●
SS	Charleston White	Jr.	6-0 185
FS	Shalom Luani	Sr.	6-0 201 ●
P	Zach Charme	So.	6-1 192 ●



Falk had three games in which he completed at least 40 passes last year. All other FBS QBs combined for two.

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.6 ● FPI CHANCE WASHINGTON STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Eastern Washington **97%** ● 9/10 @ Boise State **36%** ● 9/17 vs. Idaho **95%**
9/24 BYE ● 10/1 vs. Oregon **51%** ● 10/8 @ Stanford **22%** ● 10/15 vs. UCLA **39%**
10/22 @ Arizona State **47%** ● 10/29 @ Oregon State **66%** ● 11/5 vs. Arizona **52%**
11/12 vs. California **67%** ● 11/19 @ Colorado **57%** ● 11/25 vs. Washington **33%**

5 California

COACH Sonny Dykes (4th season)
14-23 (1-0 in bowl games)

After winning eight games for the first time since 2009, the Bears begin life without Jared Goff. Coach Sonny Dykes will have new faces all over the offense, among them the coordinator, Jake Spavital, who replaces Tony Franklin. On defense, the Bears have to survive the North's rugged offenses after the transfer of senior linebacker Hardy Nickerson. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (4-5)
BOWL GAME Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl vs. Air Force, 55-36 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Jared Goff: 4,719 yards
RUSHING Khalfani Muhammad: 586 yards
RECEIVING Bryce Treggs: 956 yards
TACKLES Hardy Nickerson: 112
SACKS Kyle Kragen: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Darius White: 3

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● ALL EYES ON OC Jake Spavital

The former Texas A&M offensive coordinator has been handed the keys to a potentially potent offense. Last season the Bears threw for 4,892 yards—fifth best nationally—but now they're without the stars who created most of those fireworks. Gone is Jared Goff (529 pass attempts, 4,719 passing yards, 43 passing TDs), as are the top six receivers, all of whom accounted for at least 40 catches and 450 receiving yards apiece last year. Chad Hansen is the unit's top returning receiver, but he accounted for just 19 catches and one touchdown in 2015.

● X-FACTOR The running game

Cal has never averaged more than 153 rushing ypg under Dykes, which leaves it in the bottom half of the Pac-12 rankings. But with the likes of Tre Watson (45.8 ypg in 2015), Khalfani Muhammad (48.8 ypg) and Vic Enwere (38.8 ypg), the Bears could push toward the middle of the Pac-12.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Goff started all 37 games from 2013 to '15, setting 26 school records, including career marks of 12,220 yards and 96 TDs. Chase Forrest, who redshirted in 2014 and went 10-of-18 for 162 yards, a TD and an INT in three games as Goff's backup, has Dykes' trust. But the 6-foot-2, 205-pound passer will be pushed by Luke Rubenzer and Ross Bowers, who both pose a running threat. A wild card: Graduate transfer Zach Kline, who left Cal two years ago after losing the job to Goff, returns for another shot at the job.

THE PRESSER

● The loss of Goff, Cal's best offensive player since Marshawn Lynch, could foreshadow a down year for Cal. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THIS IS A REBUILDING YEAR?** "Tough to say. I'd love to say yes—sign me up for that. But they're good at what they do. They have their scheme. So they're a little bit of an unknown. I assume they have another first-round draft pick at quarterback, NFL-level receivers. But I hope it's a rebuilding year." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● Rubenzer has played on offense and defense for the Bears. Last season he was used as a safety and recorded 43 tackles and two interceptions. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A VERSATILE PLAYER?** "In high school, the key guy is usually the running back or the quarterback. Those guys could've played a lot of positions if [they weren't] preoccupied with playing quarterback. I think there's an awareness there that's beneficial." —Pac-12 head coach

● Cal will face the top four returning running backs in the Pac-12 North, including Stanford's Christian McCaffrey (144 ypg), Oregon's Royce Freeman (141 ypg) and Washington's Myles Gaskin (100 ypg). The transfer of MLB Hardy Nickerson, who had a team-high 112 tackles, leaves a big hole after he decided to play for his dad, the new DC at Illinois. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH NICKERSON WILL BE MISSED?** "We accounted for him because they did a whole bunch of things with him. They moved him around a lot, and his athleticism created problems." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Chase Forrest	So.	6-2 205
RB	Tre Watson	Jr.	5-10 190 ●
WR	Vic Wharton III	So.	6-0 200
WR	Raymond Hudson	Jr.	6-3 230
WR	Melquise Stovall	Fr.	5-9 185
WR	Carlos Strickland	RFr.	6-4 215
C	Dominic Granado	Sr.	6-4 290 ●
RG	Dwayne Wallace	Jr.	6-5 340
LG	Chris Borrayo	Sr.	6-3 310 ●
RT	Steven Moore	Sr.	6-6 305 ●
LT	Aaron Cochran	Jr.	6-8 350
K	Matt Anderson	Jr.	6-0 190 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Noah Westerfield	Jr.	6-3 250
DT	James Looney	Jr.	6-3 275 ●
DT	Tony Mekari	Jr.	6-1 280
DE	DeVante Wilson	Sr.	6-5 265 ●
WLB	Aisea Tongilava	So.	6-0 225
MLB	Devante Downs	Jr.	6-3 240
NB	Cameron Walker	Sr.	5-10 180 ●
CB	Antoine Albert	Sr.	6-1 185
CB	Darius Allensworth	Jr.	6-0 190 ●
SS	Damariy Drew	Sr.	5-11 200 ●
FS	Evan Rambo	So.	6-3 205
P	Dylan Klumph	So.	6-3 230

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.1 ● FPI CHANCE CALIFORNIA WINS

8/27 vs. Hawaii [Sydney, Australia] 87% ● 9/3 BYE ● 9/10 @ San Diego State 56%
9/17 vs. Texas 44% ● 9/24 @ Arizona State 40% ● 10/1 vs. Utah 47% ● 10/8 @ Oregon State 58%
10/15 BYE ● 10/21 vs. Oregon 40% ● 10/27 @ USC 10% ● 11/5 vs. Washington 28%
11/12 @ Washington State 34% ● 11/19 vs. Stanford 30% ● 11/26 vs. UCLA 31%



JEFF CHIU/AP IMAGES

6 Oregon State

COACH Gary Andersen (2nd season)
2-10 (0-0 in bowl games)

After the team finished 2-10 in Gary Andersen's debut, going winless in conference play, Oregon State fans are hard-pressed to find silver linings. There's a ray of hope from the final game: The Beavers outscored Oregon 35-21 in the second half of a 52-42 loss. Otherwise, all that's left is Andersen's reputation as a program builder to provide hope for a turnaround in Corvallis. —C.J.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Darell Garretson

Garretson sat out last year at Oregon State after transferring from Utah State, where he made 11 starts for the Aggies in 2013 and 2014. He threw for 2,586 yards, 18 TDs and 10 INTs filling in for injured starter Chuckie Keeton. Last season, on the Beavers' scout team, he imitated the tendencies of other Pac-12 QBs, which he says helped his game.

X-FACTOR Defensive line

The Beavers recorded just 17 sacks last season (Pac-12 leader Arizona State tallied 46), and no player registered more than two. OSU will likely face several first-year quarterbacks this year (against Colorado, California, Utah, Stanford and Oregon), so getting a pass rush could be a tipping point. Andersen took over D-line coaching duties, hoping to mold Titus Falauga (29 tackles, one sack), Sumner Houston (21 tackles) and Baker Pritchard (30 tackles, 1½ sacks) into a group that can get after QBs.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Andersen's best offenses feature a star in the backfield (like Robert Turbin at Utah State and Melvin Gordon at Wisconsin), and that was missing last year as OSU ranked 10th in the league in rushing attempts. Oregon State loses three of its top five rushers: QB Seth Collins transferred, RB Storm Woods graduated and Paul Lucas moved to WR. Ryan Nall surprised in the second half of the season, rushing for two 100-yard games, including 174 yards against Oregon. Damien Haskins and juco transfer Tim Cook will also be names to watch.

THE PRESSER

Andersen, who played center at Utah, has a reputation for building teams that are tough. Oregon State was far from it last fall, but other coaches think he can do it again. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS PROGRAM IN 2016?** "We played them [at a previous stop]. I have a lot of respect for what he's capable of doing. There's no doubt he has a plan in place. Unfortunately, they're going to get better. I wish they weren't." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Nall's nickname by the end of the season was Wrecking Nall: The 6-foot-2, 235-pound sophomore averaged 6.2 yards per carry on 73 attempts. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NALL'S EMERGENCE?** "He kept getting better throughout the year. We struggled to contain him and tackle him. He showed speed against us, and there was one run when he ran away from guys in our secondary, which is not good. I think that kid got a lot more confidence as the year went on." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Garretson was 8-3 as a starter in a very similar scheme at Utah State before rejoining former Aggies OC Kevin McGiven in Corvallis. Now he has a year in the program under his belt. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW GARRETSON COULD HELP OREGON STATE?** "The biggest thing is that there's no substitute for experience, and that makes a huge difference. Guys that have playing experience, the game slows down for them, and I think it makes a huge difference for what the Beavers will do with their offense." —Pac-12 defensive coach

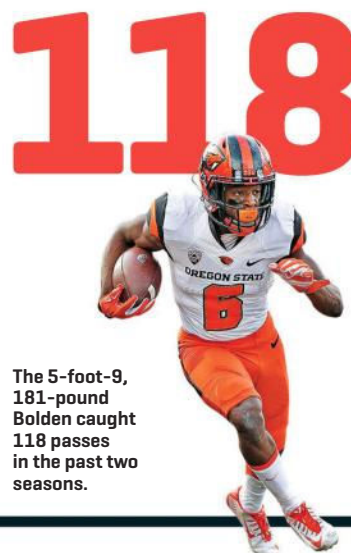
LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 (0-9 Pac-12)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Seth Collins: 935 yards
RUSHING Seth Collins: 575 yards
RECEIVING Jordan Villamin: 660 yards
TACKLES Rommel Mageo: 87
SACKS Jonathan Willis: 2
INTERCEPTIONS Rommel Mageo: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Darell Garretson	Jr.	6-0 208
RB	Ryan Nall	So.	6-2 230
WR	Hunter Jarmon	Jr.	5-11 193 ●
WR	Victor Bolden	Sr.	5-9 181 ●
WR	Jordan Villamin	Jr.	6-5 232 ●
TE	Caleb Smith	Sr.	6-6 266 ●
C	Leo Fuimaono	Jr.	6-2 300
RG	Gavin Andrews	Sr.	6-6 332
LG	Fred Lauina	Jr.	6-4 310 ●
RT	Dustin Stanton	Sr.	6-6 304 ●
LT	Sean Harlow	Sr.	6-4 298 ●
K	Garrett Owens	Jr.	5-9 181 ●

DEFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
DE	Sumner Houston	So.	6-2 290
NT	Kalani Vakameilalo	So.	6-3 314
DE	Baker Pritchard	Jr.	6-3 272 ●
OLB	Titus Falauga	Jr.	6-3 248 ●
MLB	Caleb Saulo	Sr.	6-1 236 ●
WLB	Manase Hungalu	Jr.	6-1 237
NB	Bright Ugwoegbu	So.	6-2 226 ●
CB	Treston Decoud	Sr.	6-3 210 ●
CB	Dwayne Williams	So.	5-9 180
SS	Devin Chappell	Sr.	6-2 204 ●
FS	Brandon Arnold	Jr.	5-11 202
P	Nick Porebski	Jr.	5-10 198 ●



The 5-foot-9, 181-pound Bolden caught 118 passes in the past two seasons.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.8 ● FPI CHANCE OREGON STATE WINS

9/1 @ Minnesota 34% ● 9/10 BYE ● 9/17 vs. Idaho State 99%
9/24 vs. Boise State 26% ● 10/1 @ Colorado 32% ● 10/8 vs. California 42%
10/15 vs. Utah 32% ● 10/22 @ Washington 7% ● 10/29 vs. Washington State 34%
11/5 @ Stanford 10% ● 11/12 @ UCLA 9% ● 11/19 vs. Arizona 29% ● 11/26 vs. Oregon 24%

1 USC

COACH Clay Helton (2nd season)
5-4 (0-1 in bowl games)

After another turbulent year and another coaching change, Clay Helton begins his first full season as the Trojans' coach. He debuts with a brutal schedule, a new quarterback and a completely rebuilt defensive front. But he's not without options. The Trojans have some of the best skill players in the country and an offensive line with every starter returning. —Kevin Gemmell

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-6 (6-3)
BOWL GAME National Funding Holiday Bowl vs. Wisconsin, 23-21 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Cody Kessler: 3,536 yards
RUSHING Ronald Jones II: 987 yards
RECEIVING JuJu Smith-Schuster: 1,454 yards
TACKLES Su'a Cravens: 86
SACKS Porter Gustin: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS Cameron Smith: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON WR JuJu Smith-Schuster**
Whoever wins the quarterback job will become fast friends with Smith-Schuster. After posting 89 catches for 1,454 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, Smith-Schuster will enter 2016 as a favorite for the Biletnikoff Award. How much room is there for improvement? Consider that he was held under 100 yards receiving in each of USC's final five games, including losses to Oregon, Stanford and Wisconsin.

● **X-FACTOR DL Rasheem Green**
The Trojans are in complete rebuilding mode on the defensive front, and things got worse when projected starter Kenny Bigelow was lost in the spring with a torn ACL—his second in three years. Green leads a talented group of sophomores: He was solid off the bench as a freshman, with nine tackles combined against Oregon and Stanford. Noah Jefferson played in every game and started in the Holiday Bowl, and Jacob Daniel and Malik Dorton also made appearances, albeit brief ones. It's a group that's thin on depth and experience.

● **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
The quarterback spot at USC is one of the most glamorous in college football. Max Browne, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound junior, has waited behind Cody Kessler for two years, throwing just 19 passes, completing 11 of them for 143 yards. But redshirt freshman Sam Darnold impressed on the scout team and will push him. The winner of the derby gets the keys to an offense loaded with talent—and one on a crash course with the Tide defense.

THE PRESSER

● Coaches always reference USC's blue-chippers and how the program annually leads the Pac-12 in recruiting. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT USC'S TALENT LEVEL?** "They have a lot of lead singers but not a lot of bass players. Bass players, they keep the whole thing together while the lead guitarist and lead singer do their things. I don't know how many bass players they have. But I know they have a lot of guys who want the mic and the guitar solos." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● The opener against Alabama poses a test for Helton, who lost his first two games as "official" head coach (to Stanford in the Pac-12 championship game and against Wisconsin in the Holiday Bowl). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW BIG THE OPENER IS?** "They are getting Alabama at a really bad time for [USC's] program. It's Clay's first season opener as a head coach. They don't know who the quarterback is going to be. If they were a team loaded for a national championship run, then I'd say it's extremely important. But I don't think they are." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● Despite lofty expectations, USC has just one 10-win season in the past four years. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT A PERCEPTION OF USC AS UNDERACHIEVER?** "When you look at what those kids have had to go through, it's almost miraculous that they have been able to stay above .500. But at the same time, you look at that roster and all of the talent and athleticism and you have to ask: What's going wrong? What's missing? And I don't know what the answer is." —Pac-12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE				● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Max Browne	Jr.	6-5	220	
RB	Ronald Jones	So.	6-0	185	●
WR	Steven Mitchell Jr.	Jr.	5-10	190	●
WR	Darreus Rogers	Sr.	6-1	215	●
WR	JuJu Smith-Schuster	Jr.	6-2	215	●
TE	Taylor McNamara	Sr.	6-5	245	●
C	Toa Lobendahn	Jr.	6-3	290	●
RG	Viane Talamaiavao	Jr.	6-2	320	●
LG	Damien Mama	Jr.	6-4	327	●
RT	Zach Banner	Sr.	6-9	350	●
LT	Chad Wheeler	Sr.	6-6	300	●
K	Matt Boermeester	Jr.	6-0	180	

DEFENSE				● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Malik Dorton	So.	6-2	275	
DT	Rasheem Green	So.	6-5	265	
DT	Noah Jefferson	So.	6-8	330	
OLB	Porter Gustin	So.	6-5	250	
ILB	Cameron Smith	So.	6-2	245	●
ILB	Osa Masina	So.	6-4	245	
OLB	Uchenna Nwosu	Jr.	6-3	210	
CB	Adoree' Jackson	Jr.	5-11	185	●
CB	Iman Marshall	So.	6-2	200	●
SS	Chris Hawkins	Jr.	5-11	195	●
FS	Marvell Tell III	So.	6-2	195	●
P	Chris Tilbey	So.	6-5	220	

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● FPI CHANCE USC WINS

9/3 vs. Alabama [Arlington, Texas] 38% ● 9/10 vs. Utah State 95% ● 9/17 @ Stanford 51%
9/23 @ Utah 70% ● 10/1 vs. Arizona State 89% ● 10/8 vs. Colorado 92%
10/15 @ Arizona 67% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/27 vs. California 90% ● 11/5 vs. Oregon 80%
11/12 @ Washington 48% ● 11/19 @ UCLA 56% ● 11/26 vs. Notre Dame 71%



UCLA's hopes for a conference title fell well short after key injuries on defense led to an eight-win season. Talented sophomore quarterback Josh Rosen lived up to his five-star billing, but his top receivers and 1,300-yard rusher, Paul Perkins, have to be replaced. Another change: Offensive coordinator Kennedy Polamalu steps in for the departed Noel Mazzone. —K.G.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Josh Rosen

The Bruins went all-in with the 6-foot-4, 210-pound prize recruit as a true freshman last season, and he lived up to the "Chosen Rosen" hype in his first start. Against Virginia, he completed 28 of 35 passes for 351 yards, three TDs and no interceptions. But two games later, he showed his inexperience with three first-half picks and a total of 106 passing yards against BYU. Rosen completed 60 percent of his passes and averaged 282.3 yards per game, and he threw 23 touchdowns with just 11 interceptions. Still, seven of those picks came in the Bruins' five losses, including two in a 40-21 drubbing against USC.

● X-FACTOR DL Eddie Vanderdoes

Vanderdoes, a junior, was one of the Pac-12's best defenders before suffering a knee injury in the opener after he'd already recorded eight tackles, two for a loss, against Virginia. Without Vanderdoes, as well as LB Myles Jack [knee] and CB Fabian Moreau [foot], all of whom were lost for the season, the UCLA defense allowed nearly 200 rushing yards per game. The return of the 6-3, 305-pound Vanderdoes (50 tackles, 5½ TFLs in 2014) will help fix that.

● POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

The Bruins lost four of their top five pass catchers, and although Darren Andrews (42 catches, 429 yards), Eldridge Massington (11 for 120) and Kenneth Walker III (9 for 231) have experience, they combined for just two TD receptions last season. ESPN 300 recruit Theo Howard, who enrolled early, leads a group of four-star recruits who could work into the mix.

THE PRESSER

● No one is questioning Rosen's talent, but some have asked whether the QB has matured. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ROSEN?** "On the field, he's one of the best talents I've seen in a while. Incredible head for the game. But you also hear stories about him. That he's too cocky or that he's not coachable. Sometimes overconfidence gets misconstrued as cocky. I just know that a lot of people have said he's the same kid he was in high school and hasn't grown up yet." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● Hopes were high for UCLA in 2015, with dreams of a Pac-12 title and a run at the play-off. But injuries, especially to defenders such as Jack, took a huge toll. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORRIES YOU REGARDING UCLA?** "Their unpredictability. That could be a 10- or 11-win team, or they could be a six-win team. You never have a sense of what you're going to get out of them until kickoff." —Pac-12 defensive coach

● The Bruins were in the top half of the league in scoring in three of the four years Mazzone was offensive coordinator. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT CHANGES TO EXPECT ON OFFENSE?** "To be honest, I'm still getting used to seeing Kennedy Polamalu wearing blue instead of red. [He was a longtime USC assistant who was hired to coach UCLA's running backs and then promoted to offensive coordinator.] I think of him and I think USC. I think what they run now fits the quarterback. Swing pass, run. Swing pass, run. Run, deep ball. I don't think it's going to be radically different." —Pac-12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (5-4)

BOWL GAME Foster Farms Bowl
vs. Nebraska, 37-29 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Josh Rosen: 3,670 yards

RUSHING Paul Perkins: 1,343 yards

RECEIVING Jordan Payton: 1,106 yards

TACKLES Jayon Brown: 93

SACKS Aaron Wallace: 7

INTERCEPTIONS Ishmael Adams: 2

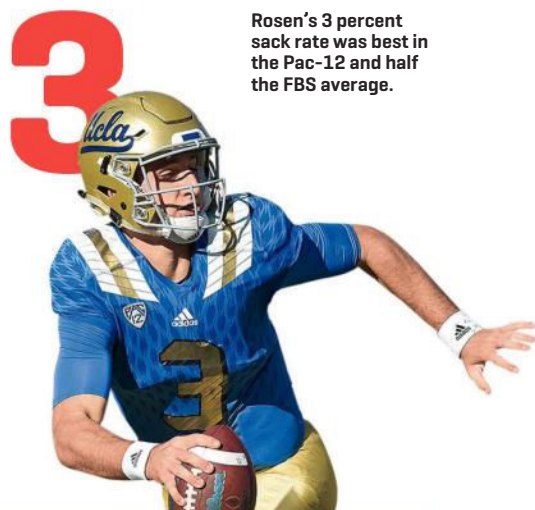
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Josh Rosen	So. 6-4 210 ●
RB	Soso Jamabo	So. 6-3 210
WR	Ishmael Adams	Sr. 5-8 180 ●
WR	Kenneth Walker III	Sr. 5-10 180
WR	Eldridge Massington	Jr. 6-2 210
TE	Nate Iese	Sr. 6-3 250
C	Scott Quessenberry	Jr. 6-4 295
RG	Kenny Lacy	Jr. 6-4 285 ●
LG	Jake Raulerson	Jr. 6-4 295
RT	Kolton Miller	So. 6-9 295
LT	Conor McDermott	Sr. 6-9 310 ●
K	JJ Molson	Fr. 6-0 190

DEFENSE

DE	Matt Dickinson	Jr. 6-4 275 ●
DT	Eli Ankou	Sr. 6-3 305 ●
DT	Eddie Vanderdoes	Jr. 6-3 305
DE	Takkarist McKinley	Sr. 6-2 258 ●
ILB	Kenny Young	Jr. 6-1 235 ●
ILB	Jayon Brown	Sr. 5-11 220 ●
OLB	Cameron Judge	Sr. 6-1 230
CB	Fabian Moreau	Sr. 6-0 200 ●
CB	Marcus Rios	Sr. 5-11 195 ●
SS	Randall Goforth	Sr. 5-10 190 ●
FS	Jaleel Wadood	Jr. 5-10 175 ●
P	Austin Kent	Fr. 6-2 210



Rosen's 3 percent sack rate was best in the Pac-12 and half the FBS average.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.2 ● FPI CHANCE UCLA WINS

9/3 @ Texas A&M **34%** ● **9/10** vs. UNLV **97%** ● **9/17** @ BYU **67%**
9/24 vs. Stanford **58%** ● **10/1** vs. Arizona **70%** ● **10/8** @ Arizona State **68%**
10/15 @ Washington State **61%** ● **10/22** vs. Utah **74%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/3** @ Colorado **75%**
11/12 vs. Oregon State **91%** ● **11/19** vs. USC **44%** ● **11/26** @ California **69%**

3 Arizona

COACH Rich Rodriguez [5th season]
33-20 [3-1 in bowl games]

Rich Rodriguez returns for his fifth season—despite seemingly being mentioned for every coaching vacancy this offseason—with an experienced offensive backfield and a desire to chase the aftertaste of a 7-6 mark. He overhauled the defensive staff, reworking a unit that gave up nearly 36 points per game, in hopes of a return to 2014 glory, when Arizona won the South. —K.G.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Anu Solomon

Solomon had an extremely successful redshirt freshman campaign in 2014, when he led the Wildcats to the Fiesta Bowl while throwing for 3,793 yards and 28 touchdowns with just nine interceptions. But he struggled as a sophomore (20 TDs, 2,667 passing yards), suffering through a particularly rough outing in a 49-3 loss to Washington, when he went 18-of-31 for 160 yards and two interceptions. His health bears watching after he suffered two concussions last season and missed games against Stanford on Oct. 3 and Arizona State on Nov. 21.

● X-FACTOR RB Nick Wilson

When healthy, Wilson is one of the conference's most dynamic players. Like Solomon, the junior had a spectacular debut in 2014, rushing for 1,375 yards and 16 touchdowns. But also like Solomon, health is a concern—knee and foot injuries limited him last season to 725 yards (559 in the first four games). He gives the Wildcats a score-from-anywhere threat: Three times in 2014 he scored on touchdown runs of 72 yards or more.

● POSITION BATTLE Center

Finding the right anchor for the offensive line would obviously help ease concerns about the health of Wilson and Solomon; the Cats averaged 3.5 sacks surrendered in losses, compared with 1.4 in wins. Senior Zach Hemmilla (6-3, 310 pounds) and sophomore Levi Walton (6-3, 290) both subbed in at center in 2015, but keep an eye on redshirt freshman Nathan Eldridge (6-3, 286), a scout-team star last year.

THE PRESSER

● Solomon did not progress as much as some predicted, following up his 59.8 Total QBR as a redshirt freshman with a 69.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OUTLOOK FOR SOLOMON?** "I'm not sure if you want to call it a sophomore slump, but he wasn't the same player last year as he was in 2014. I don't know if it was the guys around him or their schedule. He's good enough, and that offense is good enough, that he can be really productive if he bounces back." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● The Wildcats had one of the league's leakiest D's in 2015, ranking 114th in yards allowed per game. The linebacker corps had a lot of injuries, including to all-everything star Scooby Wright III. The defensive coaching staff took the fall, and Rodriguez replaced DC Jeff Casteel with Marcel Yates from Boise State. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YATES?** "I think Jeff was in a bad spot with all of the injuries they had. I know Boise State did a lot of base nickel stuff, which fits in with what Arizona was doing before. From a scheme standpoint, I don't think there will be a huge overhaul." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● Four different teams have won the South the past four years, including Arizona in 2014. It could be up for grabs again. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER ARIZONA CAN WIN THE SOUTH?** "I wouldn't count RichRod out. He kept the team together last season with that schedule and those injuries, and they still went to a bowl game." —Pac-12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 [3-6]
BOWL GAME Gildan New Mexico Bowl vs. New Mexico, 45-37 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Anu Solomon: 2,667 yards
RUSHING Jared Baker: 798 yards
RECEIVING Cayleb Jones: 904 yards
TACKLES Will Parks: 76
SACKS Reggie Gilbert: 3½
INTERCEPTIONS Jamar Allah: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Anu Solomon	Jr.	6-2 215 ●
RB	Nick Wilson	Jr.	5-10 215 ●
WR	Samajie Grant	Sr.	5-9 180 ●
WR	Trey Griffey	Sr.	6-3 209
WR	Nate Phillips	Sr.	5-7 180 ●
WR	Cam Denson	Jr.	5-11 179
C	Zach Hemmilla	Sr.	6-3 310
RG	Jacob Alsadek	Jr.	6-7 318 ●
LG	Freddie Tagaloa	Sr.	6-8 320 ●
RT	Gerhard de Beer	Jr.	6-7 311
LT	Layth Friekh	Jr.	6-5 282 ●
K	Josh Pollack	So.	5-10 184
DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Luca Bruno	Jr.	6-4 300 ●
NT	Parker Zellers	Jr.	6-1 255
DT	Sani Fuimaono	Sr.	6-1 294
LB	DeAndre' Miller	Jr.	6-3 236 ●
LB	Michael Barton	Sr.	6-0 240 ●
LB	Paul Magloire Jr.	Sr.	6-1 221 ●
NB	Demetrius Flannigan-Fowles	So.	6-2 199
CB	Dane Cruikshank	Jr.	6-1 204
CB	DaVonte' Neal	Sr.	5-10 178 ●
SS	Tellus Jones	Sr.	6-0 199 ●
FS	Anthony Mariscal	RFr.	5-10 194
P	Josh Pollack	So.	5-10 184



Wilson had 13 TDs on zone-read rushes in the past two seasons, second in the Power 5 to Ezekiel Elliott [23].

CASEY SAPIO/JUSA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE ARIZONA WINS

9/3 vs. BYU [Glendale, Ariz.] 64% ● 9/10 vs. Grambling State 99% ● 9/17 vs. Hawaii 97%
9/24 vs. Washington 43% ● 10/1 @ UCLA 30% ● 10/8 @ Utah 45%
10/15 vs. USC 33% ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Stanford 51% ● 11/5 @ Washington State 48%
11/12 vs. Colorado 79% ● 11/19 @ Oregon State 71% ● 11/25 vs. Arizona State 72%

4 Utah

COACH Kyle Whittingham [12th season]
94-46 [8-1 in bowl games]

The Utes have been on the rise since joining the Pac-12 in 2011, peaking last fall with four weeks in the top 10 and a 10-3 record. Now they look to cut down on conference losses, relying on a D that yielded 22.3 ppg and returns one of the nation's top linemen, Lowell Lotulelei. And if Washington transfer Troy Williams can ease the loss of QB Travis Wilson, Utah might climb even higher. —K.G.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DT Lowell Lotulelei

While there are multiple offensive gaps, coach Kyle Whittingham's top priority is an airtight defense. That makes the 6-foot-2, 310-pound Lotulelei perhaps his most important player. A junior with 18 career starts, Lotulelei was first-team All-Pac-12 last season, and his forced fumble against BYU in the Las Vegas Bowl led to a game-winning touchdown for the Utes. He's a run stopper, he can rush the passer and he can take on double-teams. It's not the sexiest position on the field, but what he gives the Utah defense is invaluable.

● X-FACTOR RB Joe Williams

With the lack of an explosive passing attack, the Utes leaned heavily on senior running back Devontae Booker [2,773 yards, 21 touchdowns over the past two seasons]. Williams, who carried 104 times for 477 yards last year, is expected to step in. After Booker injured a knee last November, Williams made the most of his chance in Utah's final three games, gaining 399 yards on 85 carries with three scores, including two against in-state rival BYU.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Troy Williams, a 6-2, 200-pound transfer from Washington via junior college, is the favorite to replace Wilson. Recruited by Steve Sarkisian, he appeared in just five games after the arrival of Chris Petersen. Williams transferred to Santa Monica College, where he threw 31 TDs and rushed for seven last season. He'll battle junior Brandon Cox and freshman Tyler Huntley, an early enrollee who has earned praise for his athleticism.

THE PRESSER

● The Utes won a lot of games with Wilson, but he threw just 54 career TDs against 37 INTs. There's hope that a new QB can open up the offense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TROY WILLIAMS?** "We looked at him and were impressed. I don't know why things didn't work out at Washington, but when you get new coaches, sometimes things don't mesh. It will be interesting to see how much he developed in junior college." —Pac-12 head coach

● Even before the Utes cracked the top 10, they were a tough matchup. Over the past three seasons, they've improved from 5-7 to 9-4 to 10-3. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE TOP OF THE PAC-12?** "There were only two teams in the league that won at least 10 games last year, and they were one of them. They haven't had too many recruiting splashes, but they've done a very good job developing the players they have. And their special teams are the best in the league. That's kept them in a lot of games." —Pac-12 head coach

● Utah annually has one of the toughest defenses in the conference. Two years ago, the Utes led the country in sacks [55]. Last year they led the Pac-12 in turnovers forced [34]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "Their discipline is probably the best in the league. Even when they were using Mountain West players, they were still tough to score on because they play extremely disciplined. Now that they are recruiting better, they are getting even tougher. They force you into mistakes." —Pac-12 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 [6-3]

BOWL GAME Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl vs. BYU, 35-28 W

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Travis Wilson: 2,095 yards

RUSHING Devontae Booker: 1,261 yards

RECEIVING Britain Covey: 519 yards

TACKLES Giannoni Paul: 108

SACKS Kylie Fitts: 7

INTERCEPTIONS Marcus Williams: 5

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Troy Williams	Jr.	6-2 200
RB	Joe Williams	Sr.	5-11 205
WR	Cory Butler-Byrd	Sr.	5-10 180
WR	Tyrone Smith	So.	6-4 205 ●
WR	Tim Patrick	Sr.	6-5 210
TE	Siale Fakailoatonga	Sr.	6-4 255 ●
C	Nick Nowakowski	Sr.	6-1 295
RG	Salesi Uhatafe	Jr.	6-5 315 ●
LG	Isaac Asiata	Sr.	6-3 323 ●
RT	J.J. Dielman	Sr.	6-5 300 ●
LT	Sam Tevi	Sr.	6-6 305 ●
K	Andy Phillips	Sr.	5-10 210 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Hunter Dimick	Sr.	6-3 272 ●
DT	Lowell Lotulelei	Jr.	6-2 310 ●
DT	Filipo Mokofisi	Jr.	6-3 278
DE	Kylie Fitts	Sr.	6-4 265 ●
LB	David Luafatasaga	Jr.	6-4 232
LB	Sunia Tauteoli	Jr.	6-0 220
NB	Justin Thomas	Sr.	5-8 180 ●
CB	Dominique Hatfield	Sr.	5-10 175 ●
CB	Reginald Porter	Sr.	5-11 185 ●
SS	Chase Hansen	So.	6-2 212
FS	Marcus Williams	Jr.	6-1 195 ●
P	Mitch Wishnowsky	So.	6-2 220



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.7 ● FPI CHANCE UTAH WINS

9/1 vs. Southern Utah 97% ● 9/10 vs. BYU 67% ● 9/17 @ San Jose State 70%
9/23 vs. USC 30% ● 10/1 @ California 53% ● 10/8 vs. Arizona 55%
10/15 @ Oregon State 68% ● 10/22 @ UCLA 26% ● 10/29 vs. Washington 38% ● 11/5 BYE
11/10 @ Arizona State 52% ● 11/19 vs. Oregon 53% ● 11/26 @ Colorado 62%

5 Arizona State

COACH Todd Graham [5th season]
34-19 [2-2 in bowl games]

After a disappointing 6-7 finish in 2015, the Sun Devils have a new offensive coordinator. Now they need to find a new quarterback. Coach Todd Graham, who won 10 games in both 2013 and 2014, must also work wonders on defense. ASU gave up more big plays than any other Power 5 team, allowed 33.5 points per game and was the nation's worst against the pass (337.8 ypg). —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (4-5)
BOWL GAME Motel 6 Cactus Bowl
vs. West Virginia, 43-42 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Mike Bercovici: 3,860 yards
RUSHING Demario Richard: **1,098 yards**
RECEIVING Devin Lucien: 1,074 yards
TACKLES Salamo Fiso: **99**
SACKS Antonio Longino: 11
INTERCEPTIONS Kareem Orr: **6**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON RB Demario Richard**
As the Sun Devils break in a new quarterback, there will be extra pressure on the running game, and that means a heavy workload for Richard. He posted seven 100-yard games as a sophomore last season, averaged 5.3 ypc and finished sixth in the conference with 1,098 yards. Look for Kalen Ballage [6-3, 230] to complement Richard and help form a nice one-two punch, but expect about a 2-to-1 carry ratio in Richard's favor.

● **X-FACTOR CB/WR/RB Gump Hayes**
If you don't have a three-way player in the Pac-12, you're behind the curve. For ASU, that player is Hayes. He'll likely be used primarily as a cornerback after making the switch from running back last season, but you'll see specific offensive sets for him as a hybrid back. He'll also handle punt return duties after averaging 8.4 yards per return last season. Graham has described him as a potential difference maker in all three roles.

● **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
The Sun Devils need to fill four spots on the offensive line, but they still don't know who they'll be blocking for at QB. With four players in the mix to replace the departed Mike Bercovici—Brady White, Manny Wilkins and Bryce Perkins all got equal reps in the spring ahead of the arrival of freshman Dillon Sterling-Cole in the summer—they'll likely take their competition well into fall. They'll be working with a new offensive coordinator in Chip Lindsey [formerly of Southern Miss], who will also serve as the quarterbacks coach.

THE PRESSER

● The Sun Devils led the league in sacks [46] but also gave up 88 plays of 20-plus yards—most in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE ASU DEFENSE WAS EXPOSED?** "I think people are starting to figure them out. All it takes is one coordinator to see something and make a change. Then another one notices what the change was and then another and then another. Before you know it, the entire league has figured you out and you have to start over." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● It's no secret that Graham likes to blitz. His philosophy is to make the offense defend. But last season it proved costly. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE OF GRAHAM'S DEFENSES?** "It depends on which day you get them. We've played them and they've sacked us a bunch and won. Another time we were able to hit big plays on them. When they have the right personnel, it can be completely destructive. But when they don't, there are holes." —Pac-12 offensive coach

● The offense slumped last season [fewer points per game, more turnovers] and never really found a go-to threat. Now there is a quarterback competition. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE QB SITUATION?** "We looked at all of those guys, and they are a pretty diverse group. You've got different guys with different skill sets—pocket passers [White and Sterling-Cole] and mobile guys [Perkins and Wilkins]. I wouldn't be surprised to see them use different packages for different guys." —Pac-12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

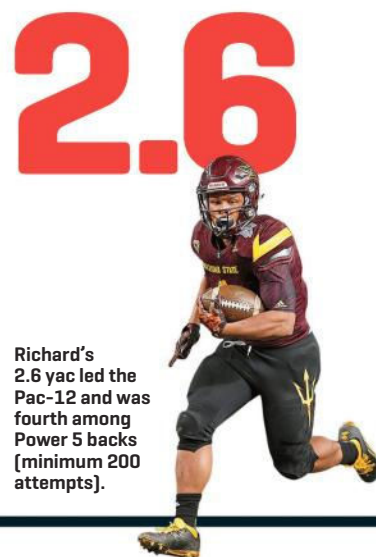
OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Brady White	RFr.	6-2 200
RB	Demario Richard	Jr.	5-10 220 ●
WR	Cameron Smith	Jr.	5-11 193
WR	Jalen Harvey	So.	6-1 200 ●
WR	N'Keal Harry	Fr.	6-4 200
TE	Kody Kohl	Sr.	6-3 235 ●
C	Stephon McCray	Sr.	6-3 314
RG	Steven Miller	RFr.	6-5 310
LG	Sam Jones	So.	6-5 297
RT	Tyson Rising	Jr.	6-5 275
LT	Evan Goodman	Sr.	6-4 310 ●
K	Zane Gonzalez	Sr.	6-1 190 ●

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	JoJo Wicker	So.	6-3 275 ●
DT	Tashon Smallwood	Jr.	6-1 280 ●
NT	Viliami Latu	Sr.	6-2 290
OLB	Douglasson Subtyl	Jr.	6-4 245
ILB	Christian Sam	Jr.	6-1 240 ●
ILB	Salamo Fiso	Sr.	6-0 230 ●
OLB	Koron Crump	Jr.	6-4 220
CB	J'Marcus Rhodes	Jr.	6-1 195
CB	Kareem Orr	So.	5-11 195 ●
SS	Armand Perry	So.	6-1 200
FS	Laiu Moeakiola	Sr.	6-1 215 ●
P	Matt Haack	Sr.	6-1 199 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● FPI CHANCE ARIZONA STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Northern Arizona **97%** ● 9/10 vs. Texas Tech **58%** ● 9/17 @ UTSA **92%**
9/24 vs. California **60%** ● 10/1 @ USC **12%** ● 10/8 vs. UCLA **32%**
10/15 @ Colorado **50%** ● 10/22 vs. Washington State **54%** ● 10/29 @ Oregon **24%** ● 11/5 BYE
11/10 vs. Utah **48%** ● 11/19 @ Washington **15%** ● 11/25 @ Arizona **28%**



Richard's 2.6 yac led the Pac-12 and was fourth among Power 5 backs (minimum 200 attempts).

6 Colorado

COACH Mike MacIntyre (4th season)
10-27 (0-0 in bowl games)

The Buffaloes improved considerably on defense, allowing 27 points per game last season compared with 39 in 2014, but the offense couldn't pull its weight, averaging just 25 per contest. Mike MacIntyre enters his fourth season with a 2-25 record in conference games, but he's hopeful he finally has enough depth to get the Buffs to a bowl game for the first time since 2007. —K.G.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Shay Fields

Expect Fields, a junior, to emerge as the replacement for Nelson Spruce, who left Colorado as the Pac-12's all-time receptions leader (294). An ankle injury slowed Fields last season, but he still managed 42 catches for 598 yards and four touchdowns. At 5-foot-11, 180 pounds, he's not the biggest receiver in the league. But with 19 catches of 10-plus yards last year and a long of 72, he's got the speed to stretch the field. Look for him to be the favorite target among the receiving corps.

X-FACTOR QB Sefo Liufau

Will Liufau be available in 2016? After suffering a Lisfranc foot injury at the end of last season, there is speculation he might redshirt. But that likely won't be known until well into fall camp. That makes Texas Tech graduate transfer Davis Webb intriguing as a one-year option. If Liufau can go, the Buffs get a veteran who has started 29 games and completed 62.9 percent of his passes, with 49 TDs and 29 INTs. If he can't, look for Webb (24 TDs, 13 INTs in 2014) to take over the offense.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Since MacIntyre arrived, he hasn't had a back who can give the offense 20 to 25 carries per game, which is what the staff would prefer. It's a crowded backfield, which includes Phillip Lindsay, who led the team in carries (140) and touchdowns (six) in 2015, converted receiver Donovan Lee and Michael Adkins II. Hopes are also high for Donald "Dino" Gordon, a 2015 four-star signee from Compton, California, coming off his redshirt season.

THE PRESSER

Colorado has improved under MacIntyre—the Buffs lost to Arizona, UCLA, USC and Utah by single-digit margins last year—but still doesn't win enough. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER MACINTYRE IS THE RIGHT GUY?** "I think so. I think he went into a tough spot because—and I like [Jon] Embree a lot, but that was the wrong hire [in 2011] from where they were. You don't give a team like that to a first-time head coach. The wrong hire can set a program back years. You can see they are slowly starting to build out from that." —Pac-12 offensive coach

The Buffs were last in the league in red zone scoring (70 percent) in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY STRUGGLE INSIDE THE 20?** "Red zone offense is all about playcalling. I know they brought the guy over from Texas Tech [Darrin Chiaverini, the former Colorado wide receiver hired as co-coordinator] to shake things up. They didn't have anyone who really scared us. We felt like we had a good feel for their tendencies." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Colorado hasn't been a threat to win the division since it joined the Pac-12 in 2011. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE BUFFALOES CAN CATCH UP?** "For a while they didn't have the facilities that some of the other schools did. I think they are caught up now. The best recruiting tool is winning, and until they start showing they can do that, they are going to have to put most of their emphasis on developing guys that higher-profile schools passed on." —Pac-12 offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-9 (1-8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Sefo Liufau: 2,418 yards
RUSHING Phillip Lindsay: 653 yards
RECEIVING Nelson Spruce: 1,053 yards
TACKLES Chidobe Awuzie: 84
SACKS Jimmie Gilbert: 6
INTERCEPTIONS Tedric Thompson: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Davis Webb	Sr.	6-5 225 ●
RB	Phillip Lindsay	Jr.	5-9 185 ●
WR	Devin Ross	Jr.	5-9 180 ●
WR	Juwann Winfree	Jr.	6-3 205 ●
WR	Shay Fields	Jr.	5-11 180 ●
TE	Sean Irwin	Sr.	6-3 255 ●
C	Jonathan Huckins	Jr.	6-4 310 ●
RG	Tim Lynott	RFr.	6-2 300 ●
LG	Gerrad Kough	Jr.	6-4 302 ●
RT	Sam Kronshage	Jr.	6-6 280 ●
LT	Jeromy Irwin	Sr.	6-5 310 ●
K	Diego Gonzalez	Sr.	6-0 215 ●

DEFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
DE	Samson Kafovalu	Sr.	6-4 275 ●
NG	Josh Tupou	Sr.	6-3 330 ●
DE	Jordan Carrell	Sr.	6-3 305 ●
OLB	Derek McCartney	Jr.	6-5 255 ●
ILB	Kenneth Oluigbode	Sr.	6-1 215 ●
ILB	Addison Gillam	Jr.	6-3 230 ●
SLB	Jimmie Gilbert	Sr.	6-5 225 ●
CB	Chidobe Awuzie	Sr.	6-0 205 ●
CB	Isaiah Oliver	So.	6-1 185 ●
SS	Tedric Thompson	Sr.	6-0 205 ●
FS	Ryan Moeller	Jr.	6-1 210 ●
P	Alex Kinney	So.	6-1 215 ●



Awuzie's four sacks last season was tied for fifth among Power 5 DBs.

SCHEDULE

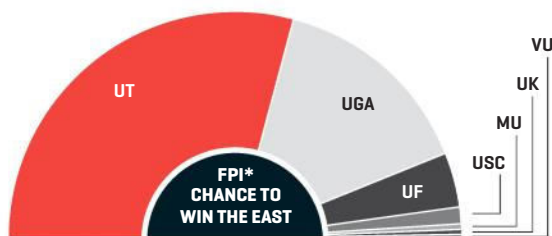
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7 ● FPI CHANCE COLORADO WINS

9/2 vs. Colorado State (Denver) 77% ● 9/10 vs. Idaho State 99% ● 9/17 @ Michigan 10%
9/24 @ Oregon 18% ● 10/1 vs. Oregon State 68% ● 10/8 @ USC 8%
10/15 vs. Arizona State 50% ● 10/22 @ Stanford 13% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/3 vs. UCLA 25%
11/12 @ Arizona 21% ● 11/19 vs. Washington State 43% ● 11/26 vs. Utah 38%

SEC

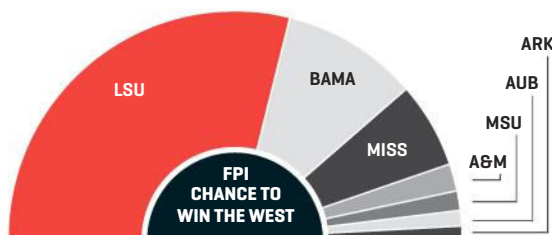
SEC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
TENNESSEE	5	58.8%
GEORGIA	9	29.3%
FLORIDA	23	8.3%
SOUTH CAROLINA	39	2.6%
MISSOURI	50	0.4%
KENTUCKY	55	0.3%
VANDERBILT	54	0.3%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
LSU	1	58.2%
ALABAMA	6	19.3%
OLE MISS	7	12.3%
TEXAS A&M	14	3.9%
MISSISSIPPI STATE	22	2.5%
AUBURN	21	2.1%
ARKANSAS	27	1.6%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
23.8

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
39%
LSU

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **Chad Kelly** Sr. Ole Miss

ALL-SEC

QB **Chad Kelly** Sr. Ole Miss
RB **Leonard Fournette** Jr. LSU
RB **Jalen Hurd** Jr. Tennessee
WR **Calvin Ridley** So. Alabama
WR **Fred Ross** Sr. Mississippi State
TE **Evan Engram** Sr. Ole Miss
OL **Ethan Pocic** Sr. LSU
OL **Braden Smith** Jr. Auburn
OL **Dylan Wiesman** Sr. Tennessee
OL **Dan Skipper** Sr. Arkansas
OL **Cam Robinson** Jr. Alabama

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE **Myles Garrett** Jr. Texas A&M

ALL-SEC

DE **Myles Garrett** Jr. Texas A&M
DE **Derek Barnett** Jr. Tennessee
DL **Jonathan Allen** Jr. Alabama
DT **Caleb Brantley** Jr. Florida
LB **Skai Moore** Sr. South Carolina
LB **Zach Cunningham** Jr. Vanderbilt
LB **Jalen Reeves-Maybin** Sr. Tennessee
CB **Jalen Tabor** Jr. Florida
CB **Cameron Sutton** Sr. Tennessee
S **Dominick Sanders** Jr. Georgia
S **Eddie Jackson** Sr. Alabama

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Daniel Carlson** Jr. Auburn
P **Johnny Townsend** Jr. Florida
RS **Evan Berry** Jr. Tennessee

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

9/3 Alabama vs. USC [94*]
9/5 Ole Miss vs. Florida State [96]
9/17 Alabama @ Ole Miss [95]

OCTOBER

10/1 Tennessee @ Georgia [94]
10/15 Alabama @ Tennessee [96]
10/22 Ole Miss @ LSU [93]

NOVEMBER

11/5 Alabama @ LSU [97]
11/12 LSU @ Arkansas [90]
11/24 LSU @ Texas A&M [95]

*Matchup quality [0-100 scale] rates games based on team strength [FPI] and how close the contest is expected to be.



STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

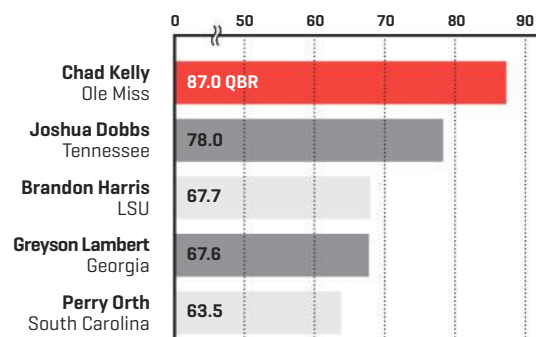
No league has it harder: Five SEC squads have top-10 slates in 2016, per SOS.

19

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Chad Kelly and Joshua Dobbs are the headliners. The rest? Fighting for QB1.



Calvin Ridley

Note to SEC teams not named Bama: Derrick Henry is gone, but there's another weapon loose in T-Town, and he's out to keep the Tide on top.

1 Tennessee

COACH Butch Jones [4th season]
21-17 [2-0 in bowl games]

Stop us if you've heard this before: Expectations are sky-high in Knoxville. Butch Jones has upped his win total by two games in back-to-back years, so anything but double-digit W's—and an SEC title-game berth—would be a disappointment in 2016. The Vols face consistency worries, but with 19 starters back, they enter the season as trendy East favorites again. —Edward Aschoff

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 [5-3]
BOWL GAME Outback Bowl
vs. Northwestern, 45-6 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Joshua Dobbs: **2,291 yards**
RUSHING Jalen Hurd: **1,288 yards**
RECEIVING Von Pearson: 409 yards
TACKLES Jalen Reeves-Maybin: **105**
SACKS Derek Barnett: **10**
INTERCEPTIONS Todd Kelly Jr.: **3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Joshua Dobbs

While the rest of the SEC enters the fall grappling with unknowns [or worse, known liabilities] behind center, Dobbs returns as one of the few marquee names. He is tough to corral—leading all conference QBs with 671 rush yards and 11 TDs last season—but Dobbs must now prove he can also hit his downfield marks. The senior threw for 200 yards just five times in '15 and was held under 100 twice. He completed 40.0 percent of passes thrown 15-plus yards downfield, which put him right in the middle of the Power 5 QB pack [T31].

● X-FACTOR New DC Bob Shoop

Tennessee's D never ranked higher than No. 7 in the SEC under John Jancek (2013-15), but Shoop has led top-25 units in total defense in each of the past five years, first at Vanderbilt, then at Penn State. He employs a more aggressive system, which should better leverage the Vols' speed, especially with the returns of likely early-round draft picks CB Cameron Sutton and LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin. With a team that surrendered three double-digit leads last year, Shoop's arrival in Knoxville is just what the scoreboard ordered.

● POSITION BATTLE Left tackle

Longtime starter Kyler Kerbyson is gone, and RT Chance Hall missed the spring with an injury, so Brett Kendrick shifted to his spot. That leaves redshirt freshman Drew Richmond to battle senior Dontavious Blair on the left. Richmond could be the future at this position, but he'll have to adjust after moving from the right side.

THE PRESSER

● Dobbs broke free for 27 runs of 10-plus yards in '15, tied with Mississippi State's Dak Prescott for most among SEC QBs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DOBBS THE RUNNER?**
"He has good feet for a bigger guy, and he knows how to get skinny. You have to send four down linemen, and you may have to dedicate a linebacker to spy him to take away that avenue, because if he's going to throw, he's gonna get the ball out quick. If it ain't out quick, he's gonna scramble. That's when it's tough, because you have to have a 'backer that's fast enough to track him down." —SEC defensive coach

● The Vols never found a dominant vertical threat last year: No UT receiver reached 500 yards. Junior WRs Josh Malone and Josh Smith return, but the duo combined for 96 targets in '15—just 24 more than RBs Jalen Hurd and Alvin Kamara. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DOWNFIELD PRODUCTION?**
"[Dobbs] can't throw the ball down the field. That's not his bag. His bag is for them to motion the back out of the backfield, throw it to him out in space, and then the guy makes defenders miss and goes 25 yards. That's a guy you want to make throw the ball and make play quarterback." —Power 5 defensive coach

● The D got burned for 30 plays of 25-plus yards in 2015, 10th most in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW SHOOP CAN FIX THE LEAKS?** "His D's have been among the best in the country in first- and second-down efficiency. They get off the field on third downs and eliminate the possibility of big-play opportunities. —SEC head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Joshua Dobbs	Sr.	6-3 207 ●
RB	Jalen Hurd	Jr.	6-4 240 ●
WR	Josh Malone	Jr.	6-3 197 ●
WR	Preston Williams	So.	6-4 209
WR	Josh Smith	Jr.	6-1 216 ●
TE	Ethan Wolf	Jr.	6-6 245 ●
C	Coleman Thomas	Jr.	6-5 301 ●
RG	Dylan Wiesman	Sr.	6-4 304 ●
LG	Jashon Robertson	Jr.	6-3 315 ●
RT	Brett Kendrick	Jr.	6-6 318 ●
LT	Drew Richmond	RFr.	6-5 301
K	Aaron Medley	Jr.	6-2 189 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Derek Barnett	Jr.	6-3 257 ●
DT	Kahlil McKenzie	So.	6-3 344
DT	Kendal Vickers	Jr.	6-3 286 ●
DE	Corey Vereen	Sr.	6-2 249 ●
WLB	Jalen Reeves-Maybin	Sr.	6-0 225 ●
MLB	Darrin Kirkland Jr.	So.	6-1 224 ●
NB	Malik Foreman	Sr.	5-10 178 ●
CB	Cameron Sutton	Sr.	5-11 186 ●
CB	Justin Martin	Jr.	6-1 183 ●
SS	Evan Berry	Jr.	5-11 207
FS	Todd Kelly Jr.	Jr.	5-11 208
P	Trevor Daniel	Jr.	6-1 248 ●

480

Hurd gained 480 of his 1,288 rush yards in the first quarter last year.



JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.2 ● FPI CHANCE TENNESSEE WINS

9/3 vs. Appalachian State **95%** ● 9/10 vs. Virginia Tech [Bristol, Tenn.] **86%** ● 9/17 vs. Ohio **99%**
9/24 vs. Florida **81%** ● 10/1 @ Georgia **56%** ● 10/8 @ Texas A&M **59%**
10/15 vs. Alabama **59%** ● 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 @ South Carolina **83%** ● 11/5 vs. Tennessee Tech **99%**
11/12 vs. Kentucky **94%** ● 11/19 vs. Missouri **93%** ● 11/26 @ Vanderbilt **89%**

2 Georgia

Another year, another season of unmet expectations in Athens. Kirby Smart takes over for Mark Richt, who was let go after 15 years, and the Nick Saban disciple inherits talent—and unknowns. The offense faces questions galore at the skill spots, and the D hinges on a potentially dynamic, if still young, lineup. In the East, that should be enough to vie for a trip to Atlanta. —E.A.

COACH Kirby Smart [1st season]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 [5-3]
BOWL GAME TaxSlayer Bowl
 vs. Penn State, 24-17 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Greyson Lambert: 1,959 yards
RUSHING Sony Michel: 1,161 yards
RECEIVING Malcolm Mitchell: 865 yards
TACKLES Jake Ganas: 102
SACKS Leonard Floyd: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS Dominick Sanders: 6

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Nick Chubb

Georgia is relatively green on offense, so Chubb—he of 13 straight 100-plus-yard games—will be a welcome sight for folks in Athens. The junior suffered a gruesome knee injury last October, but when he's healthy, he is easily the best player on the eastern side of the SEC. And with question marks under center, plus a depleted wide receiver corps [NFL-bound Malcolm Mitchell accounted for more than half of the unit's receiving yards last year], Chubb must reassert himself as a dominant backfield force. If not? The Bulldogs could really get exposed.

X-FACTOR DT Trenton Thompson

After registering just two sacks and 11½ TFLs in 2015, Georgia's defensive line desperately needs a playmaker. Thompson, a sophomore, looks ready to make that leap. His development slowed last year [just 2½ TFLs and half a sack], but the former five-star prospect screams All-American under Smart's watch.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Pick your poison, Georgia. Graduate transfer and returning starter Greyson Lambert struggled deep into SEC play, averaging just 164.3 pass ypg. Junior Brice Ramsey, the early 2015 favorite, punted almost as much as he threw last season. True freshman Jacob Eason, the top-ranked prep QB in 2016, is clearly the future of the position but has yet to take a collegiate snap. And though he boasts the most pure talent of the trio, the Bulldogs' staff has said it wants to bring him along carefully. So many options ... so little clarity.

THE PRESSER

With Mitchell gone, the Dawgs return no WR with more than 380 receiving yards. That's a challenge for an air attack that rarely found the end zone in '15, even with Mitchell: 14 TDs [T101 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE WR CONUNDRUM?** "It's not like there are guys who are going to scare you. Your inexperience at QB and your lack of depth at wide receiver would make it much more difficult for a guy like Chubb, even if he is healthy, to be a guy that you would not take out of the game defensively." —Power 5 defensive coach

The line was Georgia's weakest unit on D last year, and its lack of penetration showed: The Dawgs collected 21 total sacks [T94 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW AN EVEN YOUNGER 2016 UNIT MAY IMPROVE?** "They'll play to their strengths up front. They'll let them play thicker on guys, get their hands on guys and make them command double-teams, especially with the two interior guys [Thompson and John Atkins], which frees up your 'backers." —Power 5 defensive coach

UGA's entire starting secondary returns, led by ball hawk S Dominick Sanders. The junior came up with 6 INTs for a backfield that was the stingiest in the nation last year, allowing 156.5 pass ypg. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY SANDERS IS A PROBLEM?** "He's got range for a safety. He does a good job of reading the QB and where he's throwing the ball. He's a little like [former Bulldog] Bacarri Rambo, as far as route progressions, and he understands releases and pattern matching as a safety." —Power 5 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Jacob Eason	Fr.	6-5 211 ●
RB	Nick Chubb	Jr.	5-10 220 ●
WR	Terry Godwin	So.	5-11 174 ●
WR	Reggie Davis	Sr.	6-0 170 ●
WR	Jayson Stanley	So.	6-2 204
TE	Jeb Blazevich	Jr.	6-5 248 ●
C	Brandon Kublanow	Sr.	6-3 282 ●
RG	Greg Pyke	Sr.	6-6 313 ●
LG	Dyshon Sims	Jr.	6-4 293
RT	Tyler Catalina	Sr.	6-5 303
LT	Isaiah Wynn	Jr.	6-2 278 ●
K	Rodrigo Blankenship	RFr.	6-1 185

DEFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
DE	Jonathan Ledbetter	So.	6-4 251
NG	DaQuan Hawkins	So.	6-4 302
DT	Trenton Thompson	So.	6-4 307 ●
OLB	Lorenzo Carter	Jr.	6-6 242
MLB	Natrez Patrick	So.	6-3 248
WLB	Tim Kimbrough	Sr.	6-0 226 ●
SLB	Davin Bellamy	Jr.	6-5 241
CB	Malkom Parrish	Jr.	5-10 188 ●
CB	Juwuan Briscoe	So.	5-11 193 ●
SS	Quincy Mauger	Sr.	6-0 200 ●
FS	Dominick Sanders	Jr.	6-0 189 ●
P	Marshall Long	Fr.	6-2 223

9.5

Chubb's 9.5 ypc outside the tackles in 2015 was second most in the Power 5.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● FPI CHANCE GEORGIA WINS

9/3 vs. North Carolina [Atlanta] 62% ● 9/10 vs. Nicholls State 99% ● 9/17 @ Missouri 77%
 9/24 @ Ole Miss 38% ● 10/1 vs. Tennessee 44% ● 10/8 @ South Carolina 70%
 10/15 vs. Vanderbilt 90% 10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Florida [Jacksonville, Fla.] 63% 11/5 @ Kentucky 82%
 11/12 vs. Auburn 70% ● 11/19 vs. UL Lafayette 97% ● 11/26 vs. Georgia Tech 86%

3 Florida

COACH Jim McElwain (2nd season)
10-4 (0-1 in bowl games)

Jim McElwain engineered an epic 2015 turnaround in Gainesville, leading the Gators, winners of 11 games combined the previous two seasons, to 10 victories and an SEC title-game berth in his first year at the helm. The offense still faces major hurdles, but the defense will be elite again, so Florida will contend once more for the SEC East in McElwain's encore. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-4 (7-1)
BOWL GAME Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl vs. Michigan, 41-7 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Treon Harris: **1,676 yards**
RUSHING Kelvin Taylor: 1,035 yards
RECEIVING Antonio Callaway: **678 yards**
TACKLES Antonio Morrison: 103
SACKS Alex McCalister: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Vernon Hargreaves III: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Jarrad Davis

The senior opted to return to Gainesville for 2016, welcome news for a linebacking corps already down Antonio Morrison, the Gators' leading tackler in 2014 and 2015. Davis is a hard-hitting general in the middle of the field but can also cover ground sideline to sideline. And while injury cut short his 2014 campaign, he rebounded in a big way last year, ringing up 98 tackles [46 solo], 11 TFLs and 3½ sacks, a team high among linebackers.

● X-FACTOR DT Caleb Brantley

The Gators invaded opposing backfields often in 2015, totaling 101 TFLs, and if that dominance holds steady this fall, Brantley will likely be the catalyst. He showed flashes of pure brilliance in 2015, most notably a five-game stretch in which he registered at least half a tackle for loss in each outing, but wasn't always asked to do a ton. That will change in 2016, with Jonathan Bullard and his 17½ TFLs and 6½ sacks off to the NFL. Brantley might not be a stat machine [three sacks in '15], but he is disruptive and athletic.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

There will be pressure until a Gators QB finally proves he can consistently throw against SEC opponents. Former starter Treon Harris moved to receiver, then was suspended in the spring, so Luke Del Rio, who walked on last year, is the favorite. Still, Del Rio failed to establish himself in stints at Alabama and Oregon State, which leaves room for Purdue graduate transfer Austin Appleby and true freshmen Feleipe' Franks and Kyle Trask to enter the race.

THE PRESSER

● After taking over starting duties midway through '15, Harris completed just 48.1 percent of his passes, and Florida's aerial attack nosedived in turn: The Gators fell short of 200 pass yards in six of their final seven games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW DEL RIO COULD IMPROVE THE QB PLAY?** "He'll be a better game manager, but he's a walk-on QB at best. He'll be more of that Will Grier type, where he's going to manage it and they'll build that offense around his qualities—quick reads, quick decisions, drop back and throw it deep on a go route. It won't be overly complex the way Mac wants." —SEC defensive coach

● The Gators lose Vernon Hargreaves III [10 career INTs, 28 pass breakups] but look to have a stud in junior CB Jalen Tabor. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TABOR STACKS UP?** "He can claim that he's as good, if not better, than Vernon. Even though he's around that 6-foot range with long limbs, he can play low with his feet and he can bend. He has very fluid hips, and he can come in and out of breaks, he can transition, he can do all that stuff in lost coverage." —SEC defensive coach

● The secondary hole is bigger than just Hargreaves, with safety Keanu Neale and corner Brian Poole [17 combined starts in '15] also having departed. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK FLORIDA'S SECOND LEVEL?** "I would work the slot and attack. Senior safety Marcus Maye is as good as anybody, but he still has deficiencies in coverage. Whoever the other safety is will be a guy people will try to go at." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Luke Del Rio	So.	6-1 216 ●
RB	Mark Thompson	Jr.	6-2 228
WR	Brandon Powell	Jr.	5-9 184 ●
WR	Antonio Callaway	So.	5-11 198 ●
WR	Ahmad Fulwood	Sr.	6-4 208
TE	DeAndre Goolsby	Jr.	6-4 243
C	Cameron Dillard	Jr.	6-4 308 ●
RG	Tyler Jordan	So.	6-4 292
LG	Martez Ivey	So.	6-5 302 ●
RT	Fred Johnson	So.	6-6 305
LT	David Sharpe	Jr.	6-6 355 ●
K	Eddy Pineiro	So.	6-0 178

DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Bryan Cox	Sr.	6-3 268 ●
DT	Caleb Brantley	Jr.	6-2 314 ●
NT	Joey Ivie	Sr.	6-3 295
DE	Cece Jefferson	So.	6-1 275
WLB	Alex Anzalone	Sr.	6-3 244
MLB	Jarrad Davis	Sr.	6-2 230 ●
SLB	Daniel McMillian	Sr.	6-1 219
CB	Jalen Tabor	Jr.	6-0 191 ●
CB	Quincy Wilson	Jr.	6-1 209 ●
SS	Nick Washington	Jr.	6-0 195
FS	Marcus Maye	Sr.	6-0 207 ●
P	Johnny Townsend	Jr.	6-1 202 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4 ● FPI CHANCE FLORIDA WINS

9/3 vs. Massachusetts **99%** ● 9/10 vs. Kentucky **84%** ● 9/17 vs. North Texas **99%**
9/24 @ Tennessee **19%** ● 10/1 @ Vanderbilt **72%** ● 10/8 vs. LSU **23%** ● 10/15 vs. Missouri **79%**
10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Georgia [Jacksonville, Fla.] **37%** ● 11/5 @ Arkansas **41%**
11/12 vs. South Carolina **72%** ● 11/19 vs. Presbyterian **99%** ● 11/26 @ Florida State **14%**



Tabor was one of four SEC DBs to return two interceptions for touchdowns last year.

4 South Carolina

COACH Will Muschamp [1st season]

Will Muschamp, who took his first head-coaching gig as Urban Meyer's successor at Florida, now finds himself in the position of replacing yet another legend. Steve Spurrier hung up his visor mid-2015, so after one year as Auburn's DC, Muschamp arrives in Columbia to return the Gamecocks to SEC East contenders. Losses at WR, OL and DL will make that a tough task in Year 1. —E.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Skai Moore

The rangy, hard-hitting linebacker could have left early for the NFL but opted instead to come back to the Gamecocks, despite the changes taking root in Columbia. With his return, Moore has a real chance to lead South Carolina in tackles for a school-record fourth consecutive season (260 in his career). The senior not only stops the run and rushes the passer, he is also tremendous in coverage. Moore broke up four passes last year and has reeled in 11 career interceptions.

● X-FACTOR DE Darius English

Muschamp's first order of business on D will be to amp up South Carolina's pass rush. Opposing QBs were sacked, hit or under duress on only 22.6 percent of dropbacks in '15, a rate that put the Gamecocks just outside the Power 5's bottom 10. Be on the lookout for English, who could explode at the hybrid Buck spot. His 4½ sacks led South Carolina last year, but allowing the senior to move around more and play standing up or squatting with his hand on the ground should up his value. While he's not the biggest end (6-foot-5, 240 pounds), English has enough straightaway speed to be dominant in his new rusher role.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

New OC Kurt Roper wants to run an up-tempo spread, so mobility under center will be critical. And while a trio of QBs who logged starts in 2015 return (Perry Orth, Lorenzo Nunez, Connor Mitch), true freshman and 2016 ESPN 300 dual-threat Brandon McIlwain may be best suited to run Roper's O in the long run.

THE PRESSER

● USC must replace three starting linemen, including OT Brandon Shell, who started 47 straight games from 2012 to 2015. That's tough on a unit that yielded so-so returns [at best] in '15: 1,145 rush yards before contact, 10th in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SHAPE OF THE LINE FOR 2016?** "The O-line's not very good. It wasn't good last year, and you lose your best player. There are a lot of third-year sophomores, fourth-year juniors that just aren't SEC players." —SEC offensive coach

● Also gone is WR Pharoah Cooper and his 94.9 all-purpose yards per game from '15. There is a huge drop-off in production after Cooper, with Deebo Samuel and Matrick Belton the leading returners at receiver. They totaled 23 catches and 282 yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW SOUTH CAROLINA CAN FILL THE PHAROAH-SIZED HOLE?** "Deebo Samuel has a chance to have a good future. He's big and thick, and he has some quickness to him. He's not a slow kid, but he's not a burner." —SEC offensive coach

● The Gamecocks don't know which Muschamp D they'll get. His 2015 Auburn unit allowed 416.8 ypg in SEC play, second most in the conference, but his defenses in Gainesville never ranked below No. 15 nationally. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK HIS SCHEME?** "They jump in and out of multiple fronts. The hardest part is identifying what they are in and making sure you get that communicated well so that your combinations in the run game and your turns and protections are all coordinated." —SEC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [1-7]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Perry Orth: **1,929** yards

RUSHING Brandon Wilds: 567 yards

RECEIVING Pharoah Cooper: 973 yards

TACKLES Skai Moore: **111**

SACKS Darius English: **4½**

INTERCEPTIONS Skai Moore: **4**

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Brandon McIlwain	Fr. 6-0 206 ●
RB	David Williams	Jr. 6-1 216
WR	Deebo Samuel	So. 6-0 205 ●
WR	Bryan Edwards	Fr. 6-3 205 ●
WR	Jamari Smith	Jr. 5-10 204
TE	Kevin Crosby	So. 6-1 226
C	Alan Knott	Jr. 6-4 280 ●
RG	Cory Helms	Jr. 6-4 306
LG	Zack Bailey	So. 6-6 313
RT	D.J. Park	Jr. 6-4 330
LT	Mason Zandi	Sr. 6-8 308 ●
K	Elliott Fry	Sr. 6-0 165 ●

DEFENSE

DE	Marquavius Lewis	Sr. 6-4 270 ●
DT	Kelsey Griffin	Sr. 6-2 302
NT	Taylor Stallworth	Jr. 6-2 310 ●
DE	Daniel Fennell	RFr. 6-2 235
WLB	Larenz Bryant	Sr. 6-0 217
MLB	T.J. Holloman	Sr. 6-2 240 ●
SLB	Skai Moore	Sr. 6-2 218 ●
CB	Jamarcus King	Jr. 6-1 170
CB	Rico McWilliams	Sr. 5-11 179 ●
SS	Jordan Diggs	Sr. 6-0 211 ●
FS	Chaz Elder	Sr. 6-2 203
P	Sean Kelly	Sr. 5-10 195 ●

10

Moore was one of two SEC players with at least 2 sacks, 4 INTs and 10 disrupted dropbacks.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2 ● FPI CHANCE SOUTH CAROLINA WINS

9/1 @ Vanderbilt **58%** ● **9/10** @ Mississippi State **28%** ● **9/17** vs. East Carolina **90%**
9/24 @ Kentucky **58%** ● **10/1** vs. Texas A&M **37%** ● **10/8** vs. Georgia **30%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Massachusetts **98%** ● **10/29** vs. Tennessee **18%** ● **11/5** vs. Missouri **69%**
11/12 @ Florida **28%** ● **11/19** vs. Western Carolina **98%** ● **11/26** @ Clemson **10%**

5 Missouri

COACH Barry Odom [1st season]

After Gary Pinkel, the program's winningest coach (118-73), resigned last season, Mizzou looked in-house to promote former Tiger and D-coordinator Barry Odom to headman. He'll benefit from a dependable defense but must hope the introduction of an up-tempo attack will spark an offense that was punchless in 2015. In the end, another middling SEC finish looks to be in store. —E.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Drew Lock

Even after completing just 45.6 percent of his passes in SEC play, with two TDs and six picks, and owning an SEC-worst 23.4 QBR among starters, Lock is crucial to Mizzou's success. There just aren't enough playmakers at the other skill spots to take the lead—the Tigers were one of five teams in the nation to fall short of 2,000 yards rushing and passing in 2015. If there is a potential savior to the offensive woes, it's that the sophomore at least appeared more comfortable this spring with new OC Josh Heupel's up-tempo style.

● X-FACTOR WR Chris Black

The Alabama transfer might just be the dependable safety net Lock needs to get Mizzou humming. Though he never caught fire in Tuscaloosa—25 catches for 290 yards in three seasons—Black is a former 22nd-ranked ESPN 150 prep and is arguably the most talented wideout in Columbia. Consider: Missouri had no vertical attack [16 catches of 25-plus yards in '15, T119 in the FBS], nor a single go-to receiver. The Tigers return no one with more than 30 catches or 350 yards last year.

● POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

New faces, redshirts and backups abound. Down four starters with nearly 130 career starts, the O-line returns only a couple of semi-familiar names in Nate Crawford and Alec Abeln, who combined for 11 starts last season. Both tackles will start from scratch, while a couple of sophomores, OT Paul Adams and G Kevin Pendleton, got some work toward the end of the season and could man the right side.

THE PRESSER

● In his seven starts vs. SEC teams last year, Lock threw for more than 150 yards just once—151 against Florida. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON LOCK'S STRUGGLES?** "The way you exploit them is to have corners who can play press and take away all the short throws. That will force Lock to make throws where he actually has to sit there and read coverages and throw in tight windows, which is where he struggles." —SEC defensive coach

● New DC DeMontie Cross (TCU) employed a lot of man coverage in Fort Worth, but Mizzou played mostly zone when Odom ran the D. Even with solid senior CB Aarion Penton back, fitting those puzzle pieces might prove tricky. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT A NEW PHILOSOPHY MEANS FOR THE MIZZOU D?** "I think [zone] fits the players that they have. They played more zone because they really couldn't match up in the back end. If they stay par for the course with Cross, that's going to put their corners more on islands and in one-on-one situations." —Power 5 defensive coach

● Even without stockpiling blue-chip talent on D [three ESPN 300 defenders total from 2013 to '15], Mizzou held opponents to fewer than 200 pass yards eight times in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE TEAM'S BACKBONE?** "They move [linemen] around a lot, making them better pass rushers. They'll get guys on the linemen they know they can whip the most so they can win most of the battles in there." —SEC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 [1-7]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS {returners in bold}
PASSING Drew Lock: **1,332** yards
RUSHING Ish Witter: **518** yards
RECEIVING J'Mon Moore: **350** yards
TACKLES Kentrell Brothers: 152
SACKS Charles Harris: **7**
INTERCEPTIONS Ian Simon: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Drew Lock	So.	6-4 221 ●
RB	Ish Witter	Jr.	5-10 190
WR	J'Mon Moore	Jr.	6-3 190 ●
WR	Nate Brown	Jr.	6-3 205 ●
WR	Chris Black	Sr.	6-0 192
TE	Sean Culkin	Sr.	6-6 245 ●
C	Alec Abeln	Jr.	6-3 290
RG	Kevin Pendleton	So.	6-4 315
LG	Nate Crawford	Jr.	6-5 300 ●
RT	Paul Adams	So.	6-6 290
LT	Tyler Howell	Jr.	6-8 305
K	Tucker McCann	Fr.	6-0 185
DEFENSE			
DE	Charles Harris	Jr.	6-3 255 ●
DT	Harold Brantley	Sr.	6-3 280 ●
NG	Josh Augusta	Sr.	6-4 345 ●
DE	Walter Brady	So.	6-3 255 ●
WLB	Joey Burkett	Jr.	6-2 210
MLB	Michael Scherer	Sr.	6-3 235 ●
SLB	Donavin Newsom	Sr.	6-2 230 ●
CB	Aarion Penton	Sr.	5-10 190 ●
CB	John Gibson	Sr.	6-0 190
SS	Anthony Sherrills	Jr.	6-0 200 ●
FS	Thomas Wilson	Jr.	5-10 190
P	Corey Fatony	So.	5-11 185 ●

25 Harris' seven sacks accounted for 25 percent of Mizzou's production last year.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.5 ● FPI CHANCE MISSOURI WINS

9/3 @ West Virginia **20%** ● **9/10** vs. Eastern Michigan **94%** ● **9/17** vs. Georgia **23%**
9/24 vs. Delaware State **99%** ● **10/1** @ LSU **5%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Florida **21%**
10/22 vs. Middle Tennessee **81%** ● **10/29** vs. Kentucky **65%** ● **11/5** @ South Carolina **31%**
11/12 vs. Vanderbilt **64%** ● **11/19** @ Tennessee **8%** ● **11/26** vs. Arkansas **37%**

6 Kentucky

COACH Mark Stoops [4th season]
12-24 [0-0 in bowl games]

The Wildcats have cruised to mid-October the past two years with a combined 9-3 record. Then came the second half, as Kentucky flatlined to a combined 1-11, missing the postseason both years. Padding the 2016 win column early will be a tall order, with road trips to Gainesville and Tuscaloosa by Oct. 1. A new QB and his new OC will have to learn on the fly—and fast. —E.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Drew Barker

Mark Stoops knows that if his team is going to get over the proverbial hump, the Kentucky-bred quarterback will have to be its catalyst. The coach will also need to see improvement from the former four-star prep. Barker started Kentucky's final two games in 2015 as a redshirt freshman—and looked the part. He is a legitimate weapon on the ground, but he completed just 50 percent of his 70 pass attempts last year, throwing for one touchdown and two interceptions.

● X-FACTOR New OC Eddie Gran

Gran, a Cincinnati transplant, has his work cut out for him 86 miles down I-75 in Lexington. The Wildcats have not ranked higher than ninth in the SEC in total offense and scoring since 2010. Last year was especially egregious, with Kentucky throwing six more picks [16] than touchdowns [10]. Unlike his predecessors, Gran is not an air raid disciple, but his success running up-tempo, pass-heavy attacks at prior stops should excite the fans in Kentucky. Last year his Bearcats pass offense gained 359.9 ypg, sixth most in the country.

● POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

The Wildcats lose six of their top seven tacklers from 2015, including, most critically, LB Josh Forrest. The unit was dealt an additional blow with the offseason dismissal of Jason Hatcher [marijuana trafficking], so Kentucky will depend on a pair of Big Ten transfers—Courtney Love from Nebraska and De'Niro Laster from Minnesota—to fill the hole in the defense's depleted middle.

THE PRESSER

● Stanley Williams may have durability concerns, but he is a force: His 7.1 ypc in '15 was second among SEC rushers, behind Georgia's Nick Chubb. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WILLIAMS' STRENGTHS?** "For a smaller-sized guy [5-9, 196 pounds]—he's really compact—he can get the tough yards. He's got some burst to him and some speed to get you double-digit runs." —Power 5 defensive coach

● Kentucky's O-line returns 87 starts in '16, but there is still cause for concern: The Wildcats allowed 30 total sacks last year [T84 in the FBS] and 2.3 per game in SEC play. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR O-LINE WOES?** "Their line is marginal by SEC standards. When you're marginal up front, you have a hard time protecting the QB because you're usually down [in a game]. You become a little bit more predictable, and that allows teams to tee off on you and try to exploit your weakness—the ability of your O-line to move in space while protecting the QB on throws to try and get you back in the game." —Power 5 defensive coach

● The Wildcats allowed 5.8 ypp in SEC outings, the conference's third-worst rate, while registering 17 sacks all year [T108 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW KENTUCKY'S D CAN COMPENSATE?** "They spread out on defense with all their odd overload pressures. You get odd overload from the boundary, odd overload from the field, and they really do a good job with the multiplicity of coverages in the back end—as good as anybody in the country." —SEC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 [2-6]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Patrick Towles: 2,148 yards

RUSHING Stanley Williams: 855 yards

RECEIVING Garrett Johnson: 694 yards

TACKLES Josh Forrest: 93

SACKS Josh Forrest: 3½

INTERCEPTIONS J.D. Harmon: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Drew Barker	So.	6-3 218
RB	Stanley Williams	Jr.	5-9 196 ●
WR	Dorian Baker	Jr.	6-3 208 ●
WR	Garrett Johnson	Jr.	5-11 175 ●
WR	Jeff Badet	Jr.	6-0 175 ●
TE	C.J. Conrad	So.	6-5 245 ●
C	Jon Toth	Sr.	6-5 310 ●
RG	Ramsey Meyers	Jr.	6-4 320 ●
LG	Nick Haynes	Jr.	6-3 306 ●
RT	Kyle Meadows	Jr.	6-5 302 ●
LT	Cole Mosier	Jr.	6-6 335
K	Austin MacGinnis	Jr.	5-10 180 ●

DEFENSE			
DE	Courtney Miggins	Sr.	6-5 285
NT	Matt Elam	Jr.	6-7 360
DT	Regie Meant	Jr.	6-4 302 ●
OLB	Denzil Ware	So.	6-2 255 ●
WLB	Jordan Jones	So.	6-2 215
MLB	Courtney Love	Jr.	6-2 245
NB	Blake McClain	Sr.	5-11 200 ●
CB	Chris Westry	So.	6-4 195 ●
CB	Derrick Baity	So.	6-3 180
SS	Mike Edwards	So.	6-0 200
FS	Marcus McWilson	Sr.	6-0 208 ●
P	Grant McKinniss	Fr.	6-1 210

6.7

Williams rushed for 6.7 ypc on first down last year, third best in the SEC.



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0 ● FPI CHANCE KENTUCKY WINS

9/3 vs. Southern Miss 80% ● 9/10 @ Florida 16% ● 9/17 vs. New Mexico State 94%
9/24 vs. South Carolina 42% ● 10/1 @ Alabama 6% ● 10/8 vs. Vanderbilt 58%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Mississippi State 30% ● 10/29 @ Missouri 36% ● 11/5 vs. Georgia 18%
11/12 @ Tennessee 6% ● 11/19 vs. Austin Peay 99% ● 11/26 @ Louisville 12%

7 Vanderbilt

COACH Derek Mason (3rd season)
7-17 (0-0 in bowl games)

A 4-8 follow-up to a 3-9 debut doesn't look like much on paper, but Derek Mason's squad was much improved in Year 2. The defense, which jumped from No. 68 in the country in 2014 to No. 28 last year, is starting to resemble a Mason-led unit, and the offense seems to have finally found some stability under center. Don't look now, but Vanderbilt might just be bowl eligible in 2016. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Johnny McCrary: 1,533 yards
RUSHING Ralph Webb: 1,152 yards
RECEIVING Trent Sherfield: 659 yards
TACKLES Zach Cunningham: 103
SACKS Zach Cunningham: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS Oren Burks: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Ralph Webb

Only two SEC running backs returning in 2016—LSU's Leonard Fournette and Tennessee's Jalen Hurd—outrushed Webb (96.0 ypg) last year. So for the third straight season, the junior will be the linchpin of the Commodores' offensive attack. In 2015, Webb's 1,340 total yards accounted for just over a third of Vandy's offensive output. Not surprisingly, the team goes as Webb goes: Four of his five touchdowns last season came in the Commodores' four wins.

● X-FACTOR WR C.J. Duncan

Junior WR Trent Sherfield was a pleasant surprise last season (six games with 50-plus receiving yards), but he'll need a castmate. Enter Duncan, who returns after missing all of 2015 with a leg injury. The versatile junior can line up in the backfield, be used in motion or sit down as a normal receiver. That flexibility is gold, not just for Sherfield but for Vandy's young QB. Kyle Shurmur started five games last year as a true freshman, and though he is certainly the most promising signal-caller of the Mason era, his QBR was 17.3. Attention, C.J.: Shurmur needs playmakers to shoulder the load.

● POSITION BATTLE Safety

Mason's D relies heavily on its safeties' ability to play both in the back end and in the box. With Andrew Williamson gone, junior Oren Burks needs help at the other spot. There's depth (Ryan White, Emmanuel Smith and Arnold Tarpley return), and frosh Joejuan Williams, Vandy's lone 2016 ESPN 300 prep, enrolled early and will vie for playing time from day one.

THE PRESSER

● Webb seemed to pick up even more speed late in 2015, running for fewer than 99 yards just once in his last six games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY IT'S TOUGH TO DEFEND WEBB?** "He has really good feet, so he's in and out of breaks real well. He makes full-speed cuts, where most backs have to slow down to make a cut. In the hole or on the perimeter, he does a good job of one-cutting to get north and south and making a guy miss to take it the distance." —SEC defensive coach

● Junior LB Zach Cunningham inserted himself alongside the SEC's marquee names with 103 tackles (one more than Bama's Reggie Ragland) and 16½ TFLs (three fewer than A&M's Myles Garrett) last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO GAME-PLAN FOR CUNNINGHAM?** "He's such an instinctive player at that position and has a great feel for the game. You may know where he's at, but how you're going to get to him becomes a whole different story. He tends to play a step ahead of where your guys are going." —SEC offensive coach

● After taking over defensive duties in 2015, Mason oversaw improvements on all three units—and a jump to 5.2 ypp allowed, a respectable No. 33 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MASON'S STAMP ON D?** "He's a little more multiple than Vanderbilt has been in the past. He plays both three down and four down, and he's a little more multiple in the back end as far as playing split-safety coverage and middle-of-the-field fire-zone coverage or middle-of-the-field closed coverage." —Power 5 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Kyle Shurmur	So.	6-3 223 ●
RB	Ralph Webb	Jr.	5-10 200 ●
WR	C.J. Duncan	Jr.	5-11 203 ●
WR	Caleb Scott	Jr.	6-1 198 ●
WR	Trent Sherfield	Jr.	6-1 199 ●
TE	Nathan Marcus	Jr.	6-5 242
C	Barrett Gouger	Sr.	6-4 303 ●
RG	Bruno Reagan	So.	6-3 316
LG	Delando Crooks	Jr.	6-5 307
RT	Will Holden	Sr.	6-6 312 ●
LT	Andrew Jelks	Sr.	6-6 307 ●
K	Tommy Openshaw	Jr.	6-2 188 ●

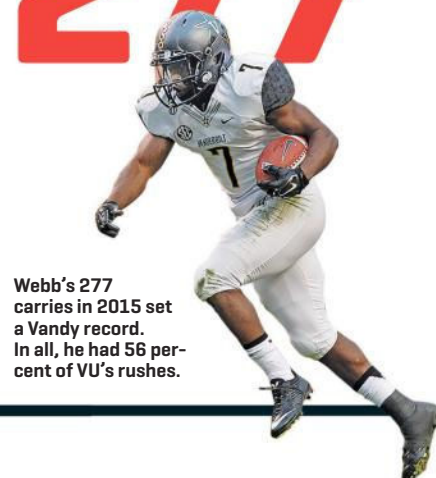
DEFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
DE	Jonathan Wynn	Jr.	6-4 255
DT	Adam Butler	Sr.	6-4 300 ●
NG	Nifae Lealao	Jr.	6-5 317 ●
OLB	Josh Smith	So.	6-4 238
ILB	Zach Cunningham	Jr.	6-4 230 ●
ILB	Nigel Bowden	Jr.	6-1 239
LB/S	Oren Burks	Jr.	6-3 220 ●
CB	Tre Herndon	Jr.	6-1 188 ●
CB	Torren McGaster	Sr.	6-0 200 ●
SS	Arnold Tarpley	Jr.	6-0 200 ●
FS	Emmanuel Smith	Jr.	6-2 222
P	Sam Loy	Fr.	6-1 185 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.6 ● FPI CHANCE VANDERBILT WINS

9/1 vs. South Carolina 42% ● 9/10 vs. Middle Tennessee 77% ● 9/17 @ Georgia Tech 34%
9/24 @ Western Kentucky 50% ● 10/1 vs. Florida 29% ● 10/8 @ Kentucky 42%
10/15 @ Georgia 10% ● 10/22 vs. Tennessee State 98% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 @ Auburn 19%
11/12 @ Missouri 36% ● 11/19 vs. Ole Miss 16% ● 11/26 vs. Tennessee 11%

277



Webb's 277 carries in 2015 set a Vandy record. In all, he had 56 percent of VU's rushes.

CHARLES MITCHELL/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

1 LSU

Leave it to Les Miles to parlay a season in which he was very nearly fired in November into a No. 3-ranked recruiting class in February. Even with three new assistants and an underwhelming pool of quarterbacks for 2016, LSU is an SEC West front-runner thanks to one of the sport's superstars in Leonard Fournette. It's a win-big-or-else campaign in Baton Rouge. —David Ching

COACH Les Miles (12th season)
112-32 (7-4 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-3 (5-3)
BOWL GAME AdvoCare V100 Texas Bowl
vs. Texas Tech, 56-27 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brandon Harris: **2,165** yards
RUSHING Leonard Fournette: **1,953** yards
RECEIVING Malachi Dupre: **698** yards
TACKLES Deion Jones: 100
SACKS Lewis Neal: 8
INTERCEPTIONS Jamal Adams: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Leonard Fournette

He sputtered against Alabama last year, rushing 19 times for 31 yards after averaging 193.1 ypg in LSU's first seven contests, so his Heisman candidacy sputtered too. But there are few surer playmakers in college football than Fournette. Last year the junior led (or co-led) the nation in rush ypg (162.8), 10-plus-yard rushes (59), 200-yard rushing games (four) and games with at least three rushing TDs (four). It's no wonder Miles hands him the ball again and again ... and again. Fournette accounted for more than 37 percent of the Tigers' offensive yards in 2015.

X-FACTOR The linebackers

Former Wisconsin DC Dave Aranda and his attacking 3-4 base arrive in Baton Rouge for 2016. The Tigers will be transitioning from last year's 4-3, and Aranda's scheme, which draws up exotic blitzes from its linebackers, will ask more from the unit in 2016. Speedy defenders like seniors Kendell Beckwith (10 TFLs in 2015) and Duke Riley will help LSU's defensive ends attack the edges.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

For the third time in as many years, Brandon Harris will compete for QB1. (He served as backup in '14 before being named starter last year.) Harris, a junior, had a solid first half in 2015, playing to a 78.2 QBR through Week 7, only to throw three TDs and five picks in November. The dual-threat QB will face off against a dropback passer, Purdue transfer Danny Etling, to try to kick-start an aerial attack that ranked No. 105 in the FBS (180.4 ypg).

THE PRESSER

Fournette broke loose for a run of at least 40 yards in five games last year and tallied seven such carries on the season (T1 among Power 5 rushers). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP HIM?** "Alabama had two guys touching him when he got to the line of scrimmage, which is key. You have to get more guys to him, which involves getting off blocks and having the talent to limit the space that he's in. Everybody else is praying they can hold the guy under 200 yards, and to them it was like, 'How many tackles for loss are we going to get?'" —SEC defensive coach

The Tigers claim a pair of deep-threat receivers in Malachi Dupre and Travin Dural (16.2 and 19.0 ypc in 2015, respectively), but Harris struggled to find them last year. He was held under 100 yards passing in four games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE AERIAL ATTACK HASN'T TAKEN OFF?** "They don't ask [Harris] to make throws [to win games]. Truth be told, if he could complete a pass consistently, they'd kill everybody, because receivers are running wide open on every play-action fake." —SEC defensive coach

LSU's D has inked 17 ESPN 300 preps in the front seven alone since 2013. That's 12 more blue chips than Wisconsin signed total in that time. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARANDA'S INFUX OF TALENT?** "He built defenses off of having big, stiff space eaters in a three-man front, then using the fourth guy, bringing him from different places to provide pass rush or disrupt the run. But he's never really had true pass rushers." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Brandon Harris	Jr.	6-3 206 ●
RB	Leonard Fournette	Jr.	6-1 230 ●
WR	Tyron Johnson	So.	6-1 189
WR	Travin Dural	Sr.	6-2 203 ●
WR	Malachi Dupre	Jr.	6-3 190 ●
TE	Colin Jeter	Sr.	6-7 244 ●
C	Ethan Pocic	Sr.	6-7 309 ●
RG	Josh Boutte	Sr.	6-5 342
LG	William Clapp	So.	6-5 303 ●
RT	Toby Weathersby	So.	6-5 292
LT	Maea Teuhema	So.	6-5 327 ●
K	Trent Domingue	Sr.	6-2 170 ●

DEFENSE		
DE	Lewis Neal	Sr. 6-2 264 ●
DT	Davon Godchaux	Jr. 6-4 293 ●
DE	Christian LaCouture	Sr. 6-5 307 ●
OLB	Arden Key	So. 6-6 245 ●
ILB	Duke Riley	Sr. 6-0 227
ILB	Kendell Beckwith	Sr. 6-2 252 ●
OLB	Tashawn Bower	Sr. 6-5 240
CB	Tre'Davious White	Sr. 5-11 191 ●
CB	Kevin Toliver II	So. 6-2 196 ●
SS	Jamal Adams	Jr. 6-1 211 ●
FS	Rickey Jefferson	Sr. 6-0 206 ●
P	Josh Growden	RFr. 6-2 197



Adams' 10 passes defended led LSU last year, and his six pass breakups was second.

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.5 ● FPI CHANCE LSU WINS

9/3 vs. Wisconsin (Green Bay) 85% ● 9/10 vs. Jacksonville State 99%
9/17 vs. Mississippi State 87% ● 9/24 @ Auburn 77% ● 10/1 vs. Missouri 95% ● 10/8 @ Florida 77%
10/15 vs. Southern Miss 99% ● 10/22 vs. Ole Miss 77% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 vs. Alabama 69%
11/12 @ Arkansas 80% ● 11/19 vs. South Alabama 99% ● 11/24 @ Texas A&M 71%

2 Alabama

COACH Nick Saban [10th season]
105-18* [7-3 in bowl games]

Nick Saban has led Alabama to rarefied air: For the Tide, every season is national championship or bust. So even with just 13 starters back, an SEC crown and a mere playoff appearance would be considered a letdown. Bama has won with inexperience before (three of Saban's four national titles have come with first-time starting QBs), so another new face under center? Old hat. —D.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON S Eddie Jackson

Defensive lineman Jonathan Allen's decision to return to Tuscaloosa hogged the headlines [29 career TFLs], but Jackson, an All-SEC safety in his first year at the position, might be an even bigger save. The Tide lose DB mainstays Cyrus Jones and Geno Matias-Smith to graduation [30 combined starts last year alone], so Jackson's early exit would have left the secondary with a gaping void. Instead, the senior, whose 6 INTs in 2015 was the most from a Tide defender since 2010, will help take pressure off Alabama youngsters like Minkah Fitzpatrick and Marlon Humphrey.

● X-FACTOR New DC Jeremy Pruitt

Other SEC programs made splashier hires [Bob Shoop to Tennessee, Dave Aranda to LSU], but bringing Pruitt back into the Alabama fold was a no-brainer for Saban. Pruitt cut his teeth in Tuscaloosa before moving on to direct defenses at Florida State [2013] and Georgia [2014-15], where his units ranked top 20 in the nation in scoring and ypg each year. Alabama has signed 34 ESPN 300 defensive prospects since '13, so he'll have plenty of talent to help ward off any drop-off from the Kirby Smart era.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Count the Tide as yet another SEC team with a question mark at QB. Junior Cooper Bateman lost the starting job to Jake Coker last season and this year must fend off redshirt freshman Blake Barnett and sophomore David Cornwell for the gig. No matter which pro-style passer gets tabbed, he'll be Lane Kiffin's third straight first-time starter in Tuscaloosa.

THE PRESSER

● The Tide lose Derrick Henry, the SEC's single-season rushing leader, who accounted for 36 percent of their offense and 74 percent of their ground game. Still, Saban has fielded 1,000-yard runners in all but three years at Alabama. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHO'S UP NEXT?** "Bo Scarbrough's going to be good. He's an athlete, a big back. They're going to pop his [butt] out there and you're going to wonder, 'Where the hell did he come from?'" —SEC defensive coach

● Kiffin guided RB-turned-QB Blake Sims to a school-record 3,487 pass yards in '14. Last year he coached first-time starter Coker to second on that list [3,110]. He'll have to conjure QB voodoo again, with just 52 passes among the candidates [all from Bateman]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER KIFFIN CAN WORK MAGIC AGAIN?** "I think so. Lane knows how to utilize the talent he has and run the plays those guys can do. The games are slow motion for Lane Kiffin on the sideline. He's able to see the defense, call the play, help the guy." —SEC defensive coach

● Bama throttles opposing QBs—its defensive QBR has ranked No. 1 in the FBS in three of the past five years. Still, dual threats [ahem Cam Newton, Johnny Manziel, Nick Marshall] can give the Tide fits. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW A DROPBACK QB CAN SUCCEED?** "I think Lane Kiffin and his offense could give Alabama's D some problems with a pro-style quarterback. You need to know what different checks to have at the line of scrimmage in order to attack it." —SEC defensive coach

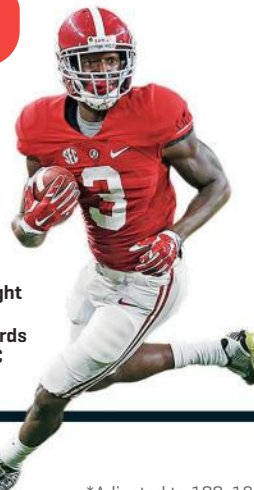
LAST SEASON

RECORD 14-1 [7-1]
BOWL GAME CFP National Championship Game Presented by AT&T vs. Clemson, 45-40 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Jake Coker: 3,110 yards
RUSHING Derrick Henry: 2,219 yards
RECEIVING Calvin Ridley: 1,045 yards
TACKLES Reggie Ragland: 102
SACKS Jonathan Allen: 12
INTERCEPTIONS Eddie Jackson: 6

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Cooper Bateman	Jr.	6-3 224
RB	Damien Harris	So.	5-11 214
WR	Calvin Ridley	So.	6-1 188 ●
WR	Robert Foster	Jr.	6-2 191
WR	ArDarius Stewart	Jr.	6-1 204 ●
TE	O.J. Howard	Sr.	6-6 242 ●
C	Ross Pierschbacher	So.	6-4 304 ●
RG	Alphonse Taylor	Sr.	6-5 345 ●
LG	Lester Cotton	So.	6-4 319
RT	Jonah Williams	Fr.	6-5 288
LT	Cam Robinson	Jr.	6-6 327 ●
K	Adam Griffith	Sr.	5-10 193 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Jonathan Allen	Sr.	6-3 294 ●
NG	Dalvin Tomlinson	Sr.	6-3 307
DE	Da'Shawn Hand	Jr.	6-4 278
OLB	Tim Williams	Sr.	6-4 237
MLB	Reuben Foster	Sr.	6-1 240 ●
WLB	Rashaan Evans	Jr.	6-3 230
SLB	Shaun Dion Hamilton	Jr.	6-0 232
CB	Minkah Fitzpatrick	So.	6-1 200 ●
CB	Marlon Humphrey	So.	6-1 198 ●
SS	Eddie Jackson	Sr.	6-0 194 ●
FS	Ronnie Harrison	So.	6-3 216
P	JK Scott	Jr.	6-5 198 ●

8



Ridley's eight catches of 40-plus yards led the SEC in 2015.

TIM HEITMAN/JUSA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● FPI CHANCE ALABAMA WINS

9/3 vs. USC [Arlington, Texas] 62% ● 9/10 vs. Western Kentucky 95% ● 9/17 @ Ole Miss 51%
9/24 vs. Kent State 99% ● 10/1 vs. Kentucky 94% ● 10/8 @ Arkansas 71%
10/15 @ Tennessee 41% ● 10/22 vs. Texas A&M 73% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 @ LSU 31%
11/12 vs. Mississippi State 80% ● 11/19 vs. Chattanooga 99% ● 11/26 vs. Auburn 80%

3 Ole Miss

COACH Hugh Freeze (5th season)
34-18 (3-1 in bowl games)

The Rebels' star-studded 2013 recruiting class—Laremy Tunsil, Robert Nkemdiche, Laquon Treadwell—came and left without an SEC title to its name. But on the heels of back-to-back New Year's Six bowl appearances, and with stud QB Chad Kelly back under center, Ole Miss is still trending up in the West. It just needs to get through September alive (Florida State, Bama, Georgia). —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (6-2)
BOWL GAME Allstate Sugar Bowl
vs. Oklahoma State, 48-20 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Chad Kelly: 4,042 yards
RUSHING Jaylen Walton: 730 yards
RECEIVING Laquon Treadwell: 1,153 yards
TACKLES DeMarquis Gates: 76
SACKS Marquis Haynes: 10
INTERCEPTIONS Trae Elston: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Chad Kelly

The senior is coming off one of the best seasons by a quarterback in SEC history—4,551 total yards, third most in the conference record books—and even with Treadwell NFL-bound, he'll have weapons aplenty in 2016. WRs Damore'ea Stringfellow and Quincy Adeboyejo and TE Evan Engram return, with 14 receiving TDs in 2015 among them. So don't look for Kelly's potent aerial attack, which racked up at least 350 yards in four games last year (most in the SEC), to be grounded any time soon.

X-FACTOR LB Rommel Mageo

Mageo's decision to take up residence in Oxford as a graduate transfer [Oregon State] is welcome news for the Rebels' D. The linebacker led the Beavers with 87 tackles last year, so he'll provide a critical, and immediate, boost to a linebacker unit that loses C.J. Johnson and Denzel Nkemdiche (18 starts and 96 tackles combined in '15) and that needs a playmaking complement to junior DeMarquis Gates.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

All five starters who lined up in the trenches for the Rebels' Sugar Bowl victory in January are gone. The arrival of five-star signee OT Gregory Little, the second-ranked prep in the 2016 ESPN 300, certainly helps, but potential starters Rod Taylor and Robert Conyers are the only Ole Miss veterans along the O-line (12 combined career starts). A handful of other linemen [Javon Patterson, Jordan Sims, Sean Rawlings] have some starting reps, but the front line is in major rebuilding mode.

THE PRESSER

Kelly broke or tied 14 single-season school records last year (4,042 pass yards, 31 TD passes) en route to an 87.0 QBR, the fourth-best mark in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW KELLY EXCELS?** "He was the best QB we played against last year. Hugh Freeze's offense is built around that quarterback—a guy who's mobile, can run the ball and whose passing game is excellent. You try to put too many people in the box and he runs those wheel routes." —SEC defensive coach

These Rebels are just not a ground-and-pound team, so even major turnover along the O-line shouldn't cripple an offense that rarely ran up the gut: 183 inside rushes in '15, tied for second fewest in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE'S IMPACT?** "That offense is not predicated on linemen just dominating. It's a finesse offense, so if they just get in your way, the ball's away quick and they run the ball on the perimeter. It's not like they just line up in the I formation." —SEC defensive coach

The star power behind the Rebels' Landshark D—both Nkemdiches, Johnson, All-SEC DBs Trae Elston and Mike Hilton—are gone. A host of new starters will try to keep the Ole Miss defense, which ranked top 25 nationally in ypp in '14 and '15, from vanishing too. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOSSES?** "Those guys affected the defense on the first level, second level, third level. When you lose that—not one but two and three of those guys—some of these young guys will have to step up." —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Chad Kelly	Sr.	6-2 215 ●
RB	Akeem Judd	Sr.	5-11 222
WR	Markell Pack	Jr.	6-2 193
WR	Quincy Adeboyejo	Sr.	6-3 195 ●
WR	Damore'ea Stringfellow	Jr.	6-2 220
TE	Evan Engram	Sr.	6-3 235 ●
C	Robert Conyers	Sr.	6-5 290
RG	Jordan Sims	So.	6-4 334
LG	Javon Patterson	So.	6-3 307 ●
RT	Sean Rawlings	So.	6-5 280 ●
LT	Gregory Little	Fr.	6-6 326
K	Gary Wunderlich	Jr.	6-0 188 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Fadol Brown	Sr.	6-4 280 ●
DT	Breeland Speaks	So.	6-3 313
NT	Issac Gross	Sr.	6-1 265
DE	Marquis Haynes	Jr.	6-3 235 ●
OLB	DeMarquis Gates	Jr.	6-2 226
MLB	Rommel Mageo	Sr.	6-2 233
OLB	Tony Conner	Sr.	6-0 215 ●
CB	Tony Bridges	Sr.	6-0 183 ●
CB	Kendarius Webster	Jr.	5-11 180 ●
SS	Deontay Anderson	Fr.	6-1 212
FS	C.J. Hampton	Jr.	6-1 205
P	Will Gleeson	Jr.	6-3 197 ●

21

Kelly's 21 TDs on 15-plus-yard throws tied him with Deshaun Watson for tops in the Power 5.



SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.1 ● FPI CHANCE OLE MISS WINS

9/5 vs. Florida State (Orlando) 30% ● 9/10 vs. Wofford 99% ● 9/17 vs. Alabama 49%
9/24 vs. Georgia 62% ● 10/1 vs. Memphis 96% ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 @ Arkansas 67%
10/22 @ LSU 23% ● 10/29 vs. Auburn 74% ● 11/5 vs. Georgia Southern 95%
11/12 @ Texas A&M 51% ● 11/19 @ Vanderbilt 84% ● 11/26 vs. Mississippi State 73%

4 Texas A&M

COACH Kevin Sumlin (5th season)
36-16 (3-1 in bowl games)

Kevin Sumlin is drifting in the wrong direction: After capturing 11 wins in his debut 2012 season, he took two steps back with a 9-4 campaign in 2013, then stagnated at eight wins apiece in '14 and '15. This offseason he tabbed former UCLA OC Noel Mazzone to assume the same position in College Station, but instability at QB might hold back an abundance of talent at WR. —D.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DE Myles Garrett

The Aggies lay claim to one of the country's premier pass-rushing defensive ends in Garrett, who has piled up 24 sacks and 32½ TFLs in his two seasons in College Station. (His two dozen QB takedowns is tied for most in the FBS in that time.) And he has help. Senior Daeshon Hall added seven sacks and 14½ TFLs in 2015, joining Garrett to form one of the SEC's top pass-rushing combos. In all, the disruptive tandem helped Texas A&M to a defensive QBR of 30.3, which was top 15 in the nation last year.

● X-FACTOR The offensive line

In February, Sumlin brought back Jim Turner for a second stint leading the Aggies' O-line, and he'll be entrusted with overhauling a thin, inexperienced unit. Texas A&M surrendered 2.9 sacks per game in 2015, tied for 107th in the nation, so Turner's ability to turn around a porous line might just be the key to the Aggies returning to form on offense. In its first year post-Johnny Manziel, A&M maintained a solid 6.3 ypp [No. 26 in the FBS] but flatlined in 2015 with 5.6 [No. 69].

● POSITION BATTLE Running back

The quarterback saga in College Station is compelling, and certainly critical, but finding Tra Carson's heir apparent at running back will also be vital this fall. Carson was the first 1,000-yard rusher in the Sumlin era, and though the Aggies have a host of backfield options, the unit's leading veteran is now junior James White, who ran for just 196 yards last year. So look for Oklahoma transfer Keith Ford and three other backs to push for touches.

THE PRESSER

● Thanks to College Station's mass QB exodus, which saw Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray transfer within a week of each other, the Aggies will hand the reins to Oklahoma graduate transfer Trevor Knight. He'll have a safety net: A&M returns its top five WRs from '15, including Christian Kirk and Josh Reynolds, who combined for 1,916 receiving yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW A&M MIGHT CLICK IN 2016?** "I think the biggest thing is being able to get on the same page. They weren't able to get the ball to their wideouts [last year]. They have guys who can make plays with the ball." —Power 5 defensive coach

● Behind Garrett, the Aggies have accumulated 70 sacks since '14, tied for third most in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU SIZE UP GARRETT?** "I don't think he's a No. 1 draft pick, but I think he'll be top 15, top 20. He's not a 3-4 guy who can stand up. He doesn't fit that Von Miller type. He's more of a hand-on-the-ground guy. He's a pass rusher. He's Simeon Rice." —SEC defensive coach

● Last season, DC John Chavis' first, the A&M defense gave up 379.7 ypg, a year after allowing 450.8. All three levels return multiple starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER YOU EXPECT THE D TO TREND UP AGAIN?** "Any time you have turnover, it takes some adjustment, learning what the players can do. What's the way to get your best 11 players on the field? I think all of that goes into it, and usually your second year is going to be better than your first." —Power 5 defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (4-4)

BOWL GAME Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl vs. Louisville, 27-21 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Kyle Allen: 2,210 yards

RUSHING Tra Carson: 1,165 yards

RECEIVING Christian Kirk: 1,009 yards

TACKLES Armani Watts: 126

SACKS Myles Garrett: 12½

INTERCEPTIONS Donovan Wilson: 5

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE

	● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Trevor Knight	Sr. 6-1 215
RB	Keith Ford	Jr. 5-11 220
WR	Speedy Noil	Jr. 5-11 192 ●
WR	Christian Kirk	So. 5-11 200 ●
WR	Josh Reynolds	Sr. 6-4 190 ●
WR	Ricky Seals-Jones	Jr. 6-5 240 ●
C	Erik McCoy	RFr. 6-4 310
RG	Jermaine Eluemunor	Sr. 6-4 320
LG	Keaton Sutherland	So. 6-5 300 ●
RT	Koda Martin	So. 6-6 300
LT	Avery Gennesy	Sr. 6-5 310 ●
K	Daniel LaCamera	So. 6-4 220

DEFENSE

DE	Daeshon Hall	Sr. 6-6 260 ●
DT	Zaycoven Henderson	Jr. 6-1 300
DT	Daylon Mack	So. 6-1 330
DE	Myles Garrett	Jr. 6-5 262 ●
LB	Richard Moore	So. 6-0 210 ●
LB	Claude George	Sr. 6-2 230
LB	Shaan Washington	Sr. 6-3 235 ●
CB	Priest Willis	Jr. 6-2 200 ●
CB	Nick Harvey	Jr. 5-10 180
SS	Armani Watts	Jr. 5-11 200 ●
FS	Justin Evans	Sr. 6-1 195 ●
P	Shane Tripucka	Jr. 6-3 215

24.4



Kirk averaged 24.4 yards per punt return, best in the FBS (minimum 10 returns).

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE TEXAS A&M WINS

9/3 vs. UCLA 66% ● 9/10 vs. Prairie View A&M 99% ● 9/17 @ Auburn 48%
9/24 vs. Arkansas [Arlington, Texas] 63% ● 10/1 @ South Carolina 63% ● 10/8 vs. Tennessee 41%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 @ Alabama 28% ● 10/29 vs. New Mexico State 99%
11/5 @ Mississippi State 49% ● 11/12 vs. Ole Miss 49% ● 11/19 vs. UTSA 99% ● 11/24 vs. LSU 29%

5 Mississippi State

COACH Dan Mullen (8th season)
55-35 (4-2 in bowl games)

The Bulldogs have not stayed home during bowl season since Dan Mullen's debut in 2009, the longest such stretch in program history. But now comes the hard part: replacing the best QB to ever wear maroon and white. Can Mississippi State reach the postseason in Year 1 A.D. (After Dak)? It'll need to find a ground game first—either in the backfield or under center. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 (4-4)
BOWL GAME Belk Bowl vs. NC State, 51-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Dak Prescott: 3,793 yards
RUSHING Dak Prescott: 588 yards
RECEIVING **Fred Ross: 1,007 yards**
TACKLES **Richie Brown: 109**
SACKS **Richie Brown: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Brandon Bryant: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Richie Brown

Even if the Bulldogs are down arguably the program's best player of all time [more on that below], they at least return a critical leader on defense in Brown. The senior never cracked the starting lineup until last season, his third, but he went on to lead the Bulldogs with 109 tackles—38 more than 2014's leading tackler. With Beniquez Brown leaving early for the draft and Zach Jackson's time in Starkville up, Brown will remain a centerpiece along Mississippi State's in-flux but still-solid front seven.

● X-FACTOR DC Peter Sirmon

Sirmon is the latest to cycle through the Mississippi State revolving door of defensive coordinators and is Mullen's sixth coach to hold the spot in eight seasons. The first-time DC [he coached linebackers at Tennessee, Washington and USC] will mix in some 3-4 alignments with the Bulldogs' 4-3 base, including a new hybrid end/linebacker spot he calls "viper," which should leverage their wealth of defensive ends.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Dak Prescott owns every Mississippi State career passing record, so good luck to his successor. In the spring, Mullen rotated four QBs with the first team, all of whom are promising, if inexperienced. Sophomore Nick Fitzgerald went 11-of-14 for 235 yards and three TDs in eight games last year. Damian Williams and Elijah Staley: 75 career attempts combined. Nick Tiano? Freshman. As Mullen said, this one's wide open.

THE PRESSER

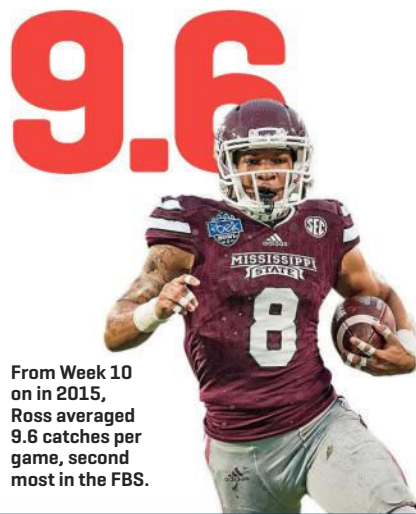
● The team's 2015 leading passer *and* rusher, Prescott had a hand in a whopping 73 percent of Mississippi State's yards last year (4,381 total). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MSU WILL HANDLE THAT HOLE IN PRODUCTION?** "He made them go. The biggest thing defending him was not letting him run between the tackles, so they'll need to find a QB to replace that. Now, here's what I will tell you about Danny [Mullen]: He's a good quarterback coach and he will find a guy. He may not be as talented, but I think that might help him a little bit because last year I think he depended on [Prescott] too much." —SEC defensive coach

● Senior Brandon Holloway is the Bulldogs' top returning running back, but he managed just 413 yards last year for a meager ground game (144.1 ypg, No. 12 in the SEC). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THE RUN GAME IS A CONCERN WITHOUT A RUSHING QB?** "No, it's just like what Florida had with Tim Tebow. The thing that [Mullen] had at Florida with those offenses is he had the speed with the fly sweeps and all that stuff, but the quarterback has got to make it run. If not, you put eight guys in the box." —SEC defensive coach

● Despite a new DC last year too, the Bulldogs' defense yielded similar—and in some cases, slightly better—results, compared with 2014: 391.2 ypg versus 424.4; 23.2 ppg versus 21.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE'S TRANSITION IN 2016?** "Dan's more heavily involved with that D than you think, so they're going to continue to run the same scheme. It's going to be a 4-3." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Nick Fitzgerald	So.	6-5 227
RB	Brandon Holloway	Sr.	5-8 165 ●
WR	Donald Gray	Jr.	5-10 193
WR	Fred Ross	Sr.	6-2 207 ●
WR	Malik Dear	So.	5-9 220
TE	Dontea Jones	Fr.	6-4 250
C	Jamaal Clayborn	Sr.	6-4 315 ●
RG	Devon Desper	Sr.	6-4 305 ●
LG	Deion Calhoun	So.	6-3 303
RT	Justin Senior	Sr.	6-5 295 ●
LT	Martinas Rankin	Jr.	6-5 302
K	Westin Graves	Jr.	6-0 163 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	A.J. Jefferson	Sr.	6-3 277 ●
DT	Nick James	Sr.	6-5 325 ●
DE	Johnathan Calvin	Sr.	6-3 263
OLB	Will Coleman	Sr.	6-5 250
WLB	Leo Lewis	RFr.	6-2 240
MLB	Richie Brown	Sr.	6-2 245 ●
SLB	J.T. Gray	Jr.	6-0 196
CB	Tolando Cleveland	Sr.	6-0 190 ●
CB	Cedric Jiles	Sr.	5-10 180
SS	Brandon Bryant	So.	5-11 205 ●
FS	Kivon Coman	Sr.	6-3 196 ●
P	Logan Cooke	Jr.	6-5 216 ●



From Week 10 on in 2015, Ross averaged 9.6 catches per game, second most in the FBS.

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE MISSISSIPPI STATE WINS

9/3 vs. South Alabama 98% ● 9/10 vs. South Carolina 72% ● 9/17 @ LSU 13%
9/24 @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) 97% ● 10/1 BYE ● 10/8 vs. Auburn 62%
10/14 @ BYU 62% ● 10/22 @ Kentucky 70% ● 10/29 vs. Samford 98% ● 11/5 vs. Texas A&M 51%
11/12 @ Alabama 20% ● 11/19 vs. Arkansas 63% ● 11/26 @ Ole Miss 27%

6 Auburn

COACH Gus Malzahn [4th season]
27-13 [1-2 in bowl games]

Has the sheen worn off so quickly? After leading the Tigers to the final BCS championship game in his debut, Gus Malzahn has spiraled at Auburn, winning eight and seven games in 2014 and 2015, respectively. He enters 2016 with a potential mess at quarterback and a new coordinator in charge of a depleted D—so even a return to 10 wins looks unlikely, never mind a title shot. —D.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON DE Carl Lawson

Auburn's vaunted defensive end has missed 19 of 40 possible games since the start of his 2013 freshman season, so he put off the NFL for one more year to prove he can, in fact, stay healthy. When he is on the field—and 100 percent—Lawson is nearly unblockable. He rang up 7½ TFLs and forced two fumbles in 2013 but sat out all of 2014 with an ACL tear. In limited reps in 2015 [fractured hip], he collected 17 tackles and one sack. Lawson flat-out changes the complexion of the Tigers' pass rush, so his return this fall will be welcome: Auburn sacked opposing QBs 19 times last season [T101 in the FBS].

● X-FACTOR LB Tre' Williams

All three starting linebackers from 2015 are gone [Kris Frost, Cassanova McKinzy, Justin Garrett: 593 combined tackles since 2012], so Williams returns to the Plains as the unit's most experienced Tiger. The departing starters predicted last year that Williams, who came up with 55 tackles and 4 TFLs in 2015, was ready to take over the D. He'll need to if Auburn has any hope of resurrecting a dormant rush defense. The Tigers allowed 4.5 ypc last year, 11th in the SEC.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Jeremy Johnson earned preseason Heisman chatter in 2015—then tossed 6 INTs in the Tigers' first three games. Sean White took over and wasn't much better, throwing for one TD in seven outings. The two are in the mix for starter again, with juco transfer John Franklin III bringing a dual-threat option.

THE PRESSER

● Malzahn's offenses have succeeded with dual-threat QBs, but neither Johnson nor White proved dangerous as a runner last year [172 rush yards total, compared with Nick Marshall's 1,866 in 2013 and '14]. The Tigers' production fell off a cliff, in turn, dropping from 485.0 ypg to 370.0 and 35.5 ppg to 27.5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MALZAHN CAN TURN IT AROUND IN 2016?** "They're going to have the play-action, but his passing game is very vanilla. It's not like defending other NFL-style offenses from that standpoint. So he's going to hang his hat on running the ball, and part of that is the QB running. When you take away that part of his offense, it really handcuffs him." —Power 5 defensive coach

● Auburn poached new DC Kevin Steele from LSU in December. He has the unenviable task of shoring up leaky rush and pass D's—Auburn allowed 182.7 rush ypg and 222.5 pass ypg in '15, both 11th in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW STEELE WILL FIT?** "He's a Southern guy ... and they have good talent. I think he's going to be more 4-3, and that's Auburn's style." —SEC defensive coach

● Lawson's return will be key for Auburn, which struggled to get off the field last year: Opponents converted 44.7 percent of third downs [T109 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWSON'S IMPACT?** "That's serious, having him back. He's a difference maker on third down. If you can get people to third-and-long, he can win. You have to put two people on him. With those other guys freed up, they can wind up winning." —SEC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 [2-6]
BOWL GAME Birmingham Bowl
vs. Memphis, 31-10 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Sean White: 1,166 yards
RUSHING Peyton Barber: 1,017 yards
RECEIVING Ricardo Louis: 716 yards
TACKLES Johnathan Ford: 118
SACKS Cassanova McKinzy: 5
INTERCEPTIONS Carlton Davis: 3

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	John Franklin III	Jr.	6-1 174 ●
RB	Jovon Robinson	Sr.	6-0 230
HB	Chandler Cox	So.	6-1 232 ●
WR	Nate Craig-Myers	Fr.	6-2 205
WR	Jason Smith	Jr.	6-1 180
WR	Marcus Davis	Sr.	5-9 180 ●
C	Xavier Dampier	Sr.	6-2 305
RG	Braden Smith	Jr.	6-6 286 ●
LG	Alex Kozan	Sr.	6-4 300 ●
RT	Darius James	Jr.	6-4 332
LT	Austin Golson	Jr.	6-5 304 ●
K	Daniel Carlson	Jr.	6-4 213 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Marlon Davidson	Fr.	6-3 281
DT	Dontavius Russell	So.	6-3 295 ●
DT	Montravius Adams	Sr.	6-4 296 ●
DE	Carl Lawson	Jr.	6-2 257 ●
WLB	Tre' Williams	Jr.	6-2 238
MLB	T.J. Neal	Sr.	6-1 235
SLB	Darrell Williams	So.	6-2 234
CB	Carlton Davis	So.	6-1 190 ●
CB	Jamel Dean	RFr.	6-2 205
SS	Johnathan Ford	Sr.	6-0 203 ●
FS	Tray Matthews	Jr.	6-1 213 ●
P	Kevin Phillips	Sr.	6-0 185 ●



Playing in just six games last year, Lawson compiled 11 QB hurries, second most on the team.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.6 ● FPI CHANCE AUBURN WINS

9/3 vs. Clemson 28% ● 9/10 vs. Arkansas State 93% ● 9/17 vs. Texas A&M 52%
9/24 vs. LSU 23% ● 10/1 vs. UL Monroe 99% ● 10/8 @ Mississippi State 38%
10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Arkansas 67% ● 10/29 @ Ole Miss 27% ● 11/5 vs. Vanderbilt 82%
11/12 @ Georgia 30% ● 11/19 vs. Alabama A&M 99% ● 11/26 @ Alabama 20%

7 Arkansas

COACH Bret Bielema (4th season)
18-20 (2-0 in bowl games)

The Razorbacks fielded one of the SEC's most dangerous offenses last year but must replace nearly every player who made them fearsome, including QB Brandon Allen, RB Alex Collins and TE Hunter Henry. After back-to-back years of rising win totals, Bret Bielema will be hard-pressed to keep pace in 2016—even with Arkansas' toughest tilts (Bama, Ole Miss, LSU) on home turf. —D.C.

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🔴 **ALL EYES ON TE Jeremy Sprinkle**
Henry, who took home last season's John Mackey Award as the nation's best tight end, was Arkansas' second-leading receiver in each of the past three years. While his absence casts a long shadow, Sprinkle is well-versed in stepping out of it. Playing behind Henry last year, the senior caught six TDs—most among SEC tight ends. And though Sprinkle's 27 catches last season paled in comparison to Henry's 51 grabs, his 14.4 ypc was just about on par. All that to say: He looks primed to continue the Razorbacks' tradition of confounding D's with those pesky crossing routes.

🔴 **X-FACTOR The running backs**
Sophomore Rawleigh Williams III is coming back from a scary neck injury, former QB/WR Damon Mitchell is still learning the intricacies of the position and true freshmen Devwah Whaley and T.J. Hammonds are promising (2016 ESPN 300 preps) but unproven. That leaves senior Kody Walker to take on an expanded role after backing up Collins last year. Walker rushed for at least one TD in four of Arkansas' final seven games—production that will be critical for a team that ran the ball on 57.8 percent of its plays in '15 (No. 14 in the Power 5).

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Offensive line**
Allen's younger brother, Austin, will inherit the QB reins, but the question now is who will protect him. RT Dan Skipper and C Frank Ragnow return, but the Hogs are otherwise inexperienced. Among potential starters: redshirt freshman Colton Jackson and converted defensive lineman Hjalte Froholdt.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Arkansas and Bama were the only SEC teams to rush for more than 2,500 yards and pass for more than 3,400 in 2015. That productivity might be hard to match with a new QB and three new O-linemen. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARKANSAS' OUTLOOK FOR 2016?** "[Allen] knew how to manage them and make good decisions. They're unproven right there. Getting good play this year at QB is the key." —SEC defensive coach

🔴 In this age of the spread, few teams use the tight end as prominently as Arkansas. The Hogs' TEs rang up 1,128 yards in '15, 162 more than any other team in the nation. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY ARE HARD TO REIN IN?** "I think that's the hardest offense right now to defend in the SEC because of the run game and the multiple blocking schemes they give you, and then all the crossing routes which are off blitzes and the way they hit the tight end." —SEC defensive coach

🔴 Last year the defense was up [116.5 rush ypg allowed, No. 12 in the FBS] and down [275.2 pass ypg allowed, No. 116]. Nearly everyone on the two-deep returns, though. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHERE YOU SEE THE D'S STRENGTHS IN 2016?** "First of all, physically they're probably the biggest defensive front seven that we faced last year besides Alabama. They play a bend-but-don't-break style of defense, which is unique. As a coach, you see things on film that you think you can take advantage of, and as the game starts, you realize, 'Man, these guys are pretty good.'" —SEC offensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (5-3)
BOWL GAME AutoZone Liberty Bowl vs. Kansas State, 45-23 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brandon Allen: 3,440 yards
RUSHING Alex Collins: 1,577 yards
RECEIVING Drew Morgan: 843 yards
TACKLES Brooks Ellis: 102
SACKS Deatrich Wise: 8
INTERCEPTIONS D.J. Dean: 2

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		Returner	Overtaking returning starter
QB	Austin Allen	Jr.	6-1 208
RB	Rawleigh Williams III	So.	5-10 224
WR	Jared Cornelius	Jr.	5-11 211 ●
WR	Drew Morgan	Sr.	6-0 195 ●
WR	Dominique Reed	Sr.	6-3 175 ●
TE	Jeremy Sprinkle	Sr.	6-6 255
C	Frank Ragnow	Jr.	6-5 314 ●
RG	Brian Wallace	So.	6-6 326
LG	Hjalte Froholdt	So.	6-4 309
RT	Dan Skipper	Sr.	6-10 326 ●
LT	Colton Jackson	RFr.	6-6 302
K	Cole Hedlund	So.	5-10 165 ●
DEFENSE			
DE	Deatrich Wise Jr.	Sr.	6-5 280 ●
DT	Jeremiah Ledbetter	Sr.	6-3 276 ●
DT	Taiwan Johnson	Sr.	6-2 287 ●
DE	McTelviu Agim	Fr.	6-3 288
LB	Dre Greenlaw	So.	6-0 231 ●
LB	Brooks Ellis	Sr.	6-2 248 ●
LB	Khalia Hackett	Jr.	6-2 215 ●
CB	Henre' Toliver	Jr.	6-1 181 ●
CB	Jared Collins	Sr.	5-11 172 ●
SS	Santos Ramirez	So.	6-2 201
FS	Josh Liddell	Jr.	6-1 210 ●
P	Toby Baker	Sr.	6-3 212 ●

77.8

Morgan caught 77.8 percent of his targets in 2015, first among Power 5 WRs (minimum 35 receptions).



SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.5 ● **FPI CHANCE ARKANSAS WINS**

9/3 vs. Louisiana Tech **93%** ● **9/10** @ TCU **47%** ● **9/17** vs. Texas State **98%**
9/24 vs. Texas A&M [Arlington, Texas] **37%** ● **10/1** vs. Alcorn State **99%** ● **10/8** vs. Alabama **29%**
10/15 vs. Ole Miss **33%** ● **10/22** @ Auburn **33%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Florida **59%**
11/12 vs. LSU **20%** ● **11/19** @ Mississippi State **37%** ● **11/26** @ Missouri **63%**

1 Notre Dame

COACH Brian Kelly [7th season]
55-23 [3-3 in bowl games]

The Irish were 30 seconds (and a Stanford touchdown drive) from a potential playoff bid last season. They'll face a typically daunting schedule (nine bowl teams) but get a reprieve from ACC heavyweights Florida State and Clemson. If Notre Dame navigates its slate with one loss, another playoff shot might be in store—it just needs to name a QB first. —Jared Shanker

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3
BOWL GAME BattleFrog Fiesta Bowl vs. Ohio State, 44-28 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING DeShone Kizer: **2,884 yards**
RUSHING C.J. Prosise: 1,032 yards
RECEIVING Will Fuller: 1,258 yards
TACKLES Jaylon Smith: 114
SACKS Romeo Okwara: 8
INTERCEPTIONS KeiVarae Russell: 2

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● **ALL EYES ON WR** Torii Hunter Jr.
There's no mistaking the name: Hunter's famous father (and namesake) is the five-time MLB All-Star. But the wideout hasn't yet established his own identity, totaling just 363 yards and two TDs last year as the fourth option behind Will Fuller, Chris Brown and Amir Carlisle. That trio [19 combined TDs] departs, so Hunter enters 2016 as Notre Dame's most established outside threat. The good news, considering his limited game reps [35 career catches], is that his three years in the system will make him familiar with the Irish QB—whoever he might be.

● **X-FACTOR LB** Nyles Morgan
Morgan replaced an injured Joe Schmidt on the Irish roster in 2014, then played his way to 47 tackles and a freshman All-America nod. But he slid down the depth chart last year, contributing just 17 tackles. With Schmidt gone, Morgan again assumes the reins at middle linebacker, with very high expectations that he'll return to form. He'll be quarterbacking a D featuring several new faces and without one big one, Jaylon Smith, flanking him.

● **POSITION BATTLE** Quarterback
Brian Kelly should have picked Urban Meyer's brain at the Fiesta Bowl for tips on navigating a wealth of QBs. Malik Zaire emerged as an early Heisman dark horse in the 2015 opener [313 yards, three TDs, 0 INTs], then broke his ankle in Week 2. DeShone Kizer took over, registering a 79.7 QBR and 10 wins on the season. And, oh, don't sleep on sophomore Brandon Wimbush, a former ESPN 300 prep and perhaps the most highly touted among the three passers.

THE PRESSER

● Zaire's sample size is small but impressive: In his two full games as the Irish starter, he played to an 88.0 QBR. He's a weapon on the ground too, averaging 41.4 rush yards in seven career outings. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ZAIRE AS A DUAL THREAT?** "I thought he was a freak. He's the real deal, man. He makes you hold your breath like Dalvin Cook when he's got the ball." —Power 5 head coach

● The trenches weren't friendly to the Irish last season—on either side of the ball. They had just 25 sacks on defense [T74 in the FBS] while giving up 26 [T59]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NOTRE DAME'S FRONT LINES?** "I don't think they're built at the line of scrimmage to compete for a championship. I don't know if they're developed well enough or if they're tough enough. Notre Dame's perception is big, strong dudes—and they aren't." —Power 5 head coach

● D-coordinator Brian VanGorder spent seven seasons in the NFL before making his way to South Bend in 2014 and insists his scheme is not too mentally taxing at the college level. But a talented Irish defense allowed 30-plus points in four games last year and gave up 20-plus yards on 63 plays [T81 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT VANGORDER?** "Schematically, he does more than double that of any of our other opponents. This is hard for us to prepare for, but it apparently is very hard for them to get right as well. Many of the big plays you saw against the 2015 defense on film were from missed assignments in the secondary." —Power 5 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	DeShone Kizer	So.	6-4 242 ●
RB	Tarean Folston	Jr.	5-9 214
WR	Torii Hunter Jr.	Jr.	6-0 195
WR	Equanimeous St. Brown	So.	6-4 205
WR	Corey Robinson	Sr.	6-4 215
TE	Alize Jones	So.	6-4 240 ●
C	Sam Mustipher	So.	6-2 305
RG	Hunter Bivin	Jr.	6-5 306
LG	Quenton Nelson	So.	6-4 335 ●
RT	Alex Bars	So.	6-6 320
LT	Mike McGlinchey	Jr.	6-7 315 ●
K	Justin Yoon	So.	5-9 190 ●

DEFENSE			
DE	Andrew Trumbetti	Jr.	6-3 260
NT	Jarron Jones	Sr.	6-5 315
DT	Daniel Cage	Jr.	6-0 315 ●
DE	Isaac Rochell	Sr.	6-3 287 ●
WLB	Greer Martini	Jr.	6-2 245
MLB	Nyles Morgan	Jr.	6-0 245
SLB	James Onwualu	Sr.	6-1 232 ●
CB	Nick Watkins	Jr.	6-0 200
CB	Cole Luke	Sr.	5-11 193 ●
SS	Max Redfield	Sr.	6-1 205 ●
FS	Drue Tranquill	So.	6-1 225
P	Tyler Newsome	So.	6-2 210 ●

SCHEDULE FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.0 ● FPI CHANCE NOTRE DAME WINS

9/4 @ Texas **54%** ● 9/10 vs. Nevada **96%** ● 9/17 vs. Michigan State **71%** ● 9/24 vs. Duke **88%**
10/1 vs. Syracuse [East Rutherford, N.J.] **85%** ● 10/8 @ NC State **67%** ● 10/15 vs. Stanford **67%**
10/22 BYE ● 10/29 vs. Miami [Fla.] **74%** ● 11/5 vs. Navy [Jacksonville, Fla.] **90%**
11/12 vs. Army [San Antonio] **95%** ● 11/19 vs. Virginia Tech **80%** ● 11/26 @ USC **29%**

78.0

Kizer's 78.0 QBR in the fourth quarter and OT last year ranked 16th in the FBS.



2 BYU

After 11 years and 99 wins in Provo, Bronco Mendenhall has moved on to Virginia. BYU alum Kalani Sitake takes the reins and inherits a wealth of QB toys, including übertalented, oft-injured Taysom Hill and 3,000-yard passer Tanner Mangum. The road to matching last year's nine wins is treacherous, though, with six Power 5 bowl teams in the first seven games. —Doug Mittler

COACH Kalani Sitake [1st season]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4
BOWL GAME Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl vs. Utah, 35-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Tanner Mangum: **3,377** yards
RUSHING Algernon Brown: **709** yards
RECEIVING Mitch Mathews: 737 yards
TACKLES Michael Wadsworth: 79
SACKS Bronson Kaufusi: 11
INTERCEPTIONS Kai Nacua: 6

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● ALL EYES ON RB Jamaal Williams

After blowing out his right knee midway through 2014, then withdrawing from school last year for undisclosed reasons, Williams returns for his senior season to a rush attack in dire need of a boost—BYU ran for 128.3 ypg in 2015, No. 111 in the FBS. The Cougars have a potentially epic turnaround in store. The last time Williams and Hill were healthy at the same time *and* on the field for the bulk of the season? Way back in 2013, when BYU averaged 267.3 rush ypg, 10th best in the nation.

● X-FACTOR New OC Ty Detmer

Sitake, a former Cougars fullback, turned to BYU royalty to helm the new-look offense. Detmer will bring back the LaVell Edwards pro-style attack, complete with a huddle—a departure from BYU's up-tempo attack of late. The lure of an NFL-like system is one reason Hill opted to stay in Provo rather than follow Mendenhall to Virginia. But the challenge will be to leverage Hill's running ability in a West Coast scheme. Working in Detmer's favor? Four returning starters on the O-line.

● POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Hill garnered Heisman chatter before suffering a Lisfranc sprain in the 2015 opener, the third season-ending injury of his four-year BYU career. But when healthy, he's a force—2,212 rush yards, 24 rush TDs and 31 pass TDs in 25 career games—which makes the decision to return to last year's starter, Mangum, tricky. Mangum played well as a 22-year-old true freshman, throwing for 23 TDs and 7.6 ypa while going 8-4 in his starts.

THE PRESSER

● When Hill was healthy for the duration of 2013, the Cougars averaged 30.2 ppg. That number actually rose to 33.8 in Hill's absence, with Mangum running the show in 2015.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHICH QB SCARES YOU MORE? "Tanner is a good QB, and he runs good enough. He's a guy who can spin it. But Taysom is a different dude. He's scary in every way because he can run, throw—I'm not going to say Manziel, but he has that kind of knack for running around and making things happen." —Group of 5 head coach

● The Cougars will hope for a reincarnation of Williams from 2013, when he recorded more than half of his rush yards (620) after first contact.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP WILLIAMS? "He's a physical, down-hill guy. You have to control the line of scrimmage, and you're probably not going to do that by going one-on-one. You're going to have to get creative up front to create some angles in those gaps to win." —Group of 5 head coach

● A defense in transition under new DC Ilaia Tuiaki will benefit from the return of playmaking LB Fred Warner (11½ TFLs in 2015). But losing D-line stalwart Bronson Kaufusi (three forced fumbles last year) leaves a hole up front.
COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STANDOUTS ON D? "Replacing Bronson will be tough. Travis Tuiloma [25 tackles in '15], the tackle who's coming back, is a stud. It will be interesting to see what they do at outside 'backer because that's such a big spot in their D. And Fred Warner is a really good player." —Group of 5 head coach

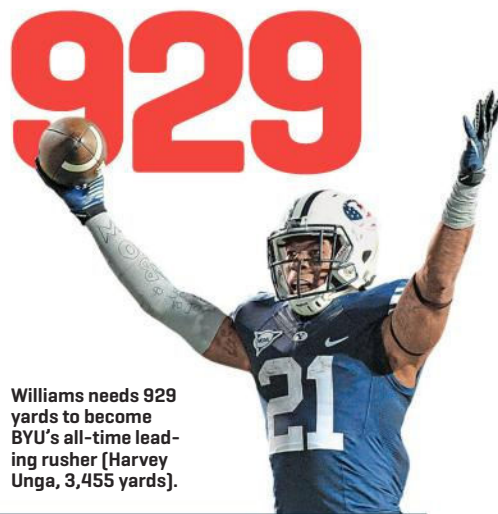
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

OFFENSE		● Returner	● Overtaking returning starter
QB	Taysom Hill	Sr.	6-2 230 ●
RB	Jamaal Williams	Sr.	6-2 220 ●
WR	Mitchell Juergens	Sr.	5-10 181 ●
WR	Nick Kurtz	Sr.	6-6 208
WR	Moroni Laulu-Pututau	So.	6-4 211
TE	Tanner Balderree	Jr.	6-3 248
C	Parker Dawe	Sr.	6-3 301 ●
RG	Tuni Kanuch	Jr.	6-3 325 ●
LG	Ului Lapuaho	Jr.	6-7 333 ●
RT	Austin Hoyt	So.	6-7 282
LT	Brad Wilcox	Sr.	6-7 310 ●
K	James Baird	Fr.	5-7 160
DEFENSE			
DE	Tomasi Laulile	Jr.	6-4 288
DT	Travis Tuiloma	Sr.	6-2 301 ●
DT	Logan Taele	Sr.	6-2 299 ●
WLB	Sae Tautu	Sr.	6-3 245 ●
FLB	Fred Warner	Jr.	6-4 227 ●
MLB	Harvey Langi	Sr.	6-3 249 ●
SLB	Francis Bernard	So.	6-0 235
CB	Michael Davis	Sr.	6-2 190 ●
CB	Troy Warner	Fr.	6-1 192
SS	Micah Hannemann	Jr.	6-0 200 ●
FS	Kai Nacua	Sr.	6-2 208 ●
P	Jonny Linehan	Sr.	6-0 201 ●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.4 ● FPI CHANCE BYU WINS

9/3 vs. Arizona [Glendale, Ariz.] 36% ● 9/10 @ Utah 33% ● 9/17 vs. UCLA 34%
 9/24 vs. West Virginia [Landover, Md.] 23% ● 9/30 vs. Toledo 83% ● 10/8 @ Michigan State 28%
 10/14 vs. Mississippi State 38% ● 10/20 @ Boise State 32% ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/5 @ Cincinnati 60%
 11/12 vs. Southern Utah 95% ● 11/19 vs. Massachusetts 97% ● 11/26 vs. Utah State 80%



Williams needs 929 yards to become BYU's all-time leading rusher [Harvey Unga, 3,455 yards].

3 Army

COACH Jeff Monken [3rd season]
6-18 [0-0 in bowl games]

Record aside, Army is improving: Seven losses came by a TD or less in 2015. Its 16 returning starters should help move some of those close calls to the win column. —D.M.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Andrew King

Army's top tackler was also its leading backfield terror. King compiled 16½ TFLs last year—10 more than any other Black Knight.

X-FACTOR WR Edgar Poe

Poe gives the triple-option a twist. He caught six TDs in 2015, triple his output from his previous two seasons combined. His three games with 95-plus yards was the most for a receiver at West Point since Jeremy Trimble in 2007.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Army employed three starters last year, two who return in 2016. Ahmad Bradshaw is the more powerful inside runner, while Chris Carter claims more pure speed and a quicker release.

THE PRESSER

➤ Carter offers Army a passing dimension not normally seen at West Point. His 208 yards vs. Navy last year marked the first time in eight years the Knights threw for more yards than they ran. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CARTER?** "He understands the triple-option completely. You have to change schematically; if you do too much of the same thing, they can book on you and make it a lot harder for you to stop." —Group of 5 head coach

➤ For a team typically known for ball possession, last year was a headache: minus-11 TO margin, tied for 113th in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARMY'S 22 TOs?** "Part of their struggles, I think, was that they were on a bunch of short fields." —Group of 5 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Ahmad Bradshaw: 429 yards

RUSHING Aaron Kemper: 544 yards

RECEIVING Edgar Poe: 441 yards

TACKLES Andrew King: 92

INTERCEPTIONS Brandon Jackson: 3

SACKS Andrew King: 4½

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0

● **FPI CHANCE ARMY WINS**

9/2 @ Temple **19%** ● 9/10 vs. Rice **74%** ● 9/17 @ UTEP **61%** ● 9/24 @ Buffalo **55%** ● 10/1 BYE ● 10/8 @ Duke **18%** ● 10/15 vs. Lafayette **97%** ● 10/22 vs. North Texas **85%** ● 10/29 @ Wake Forest **14%** ● 11/5 vs. Air Force **36%** ● 11/12 vs. Notre Dame [San Antonio] **5%** ● 11/19 vs. Morgan State **97%** ● 12/10 vs. Navy [Baltimore] **35%**

4 Massachusetts

COACH Mark Whipple [3rd season]
6-18 [0-0 in bowl games]

Mark Whipple's three wins landed the 2015 Minutemen in the MAC East basement. With a trio of SEC foes in 2016, life as an FBS independent won't be any easier. —D.M.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Marquis Young

On a team lacking firepower [22.2 ppg in '15, No. 108 in the FBS], Young offered glimpses of big-strike ability. Three of his seven TDs came on runs of 47, 50 and 83 yards.

X-FACTOR S Khary Bailey-Smith

Before his season-ending knee injury in September, Bailey-Smith logged 21 tackles in two games. His return will boost a pass D that gave up 254.9 ppg last year [T96 in the FBS].

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Ross Comis excelled in mop-up duty [8-for-8 for 69 yards vs. Notre Dame], but three-star transfer Andrew Ford [VaTech via Lackawanna College] is a pro-style QB who fits the system.

THE PRESSER

➤ Young averaged a very respectable 6.3 ypc in 2015 [No. 35 in the FBS] and ran for 10-plus yards 31 times. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO BOTTLE UP YOUNG?** "You need to force him to run between the tackles—keep the edges contained. He likes to bounce everything outside and use his speed." —Group of 5 defensive coach

➤ Helping Young's cause will be four returning O-linemen, including Fabian Hoeller, who started all 12 games at left guard last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE?** "Coach Whipple is very creative with the use of six offensive linemen and creating alignment issues and gap-responsibility issues." —Group of 5 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Blake Frohnapef: 2,919 yards

RUSHING Marquis Young: 960 yards

RECEIVING Tajae Sharpe: 1,319 yards

TACKLES Jovan Santos-Knox: 131

INTERCEPTIONS Trey Dudley-Giles: 4

SACKS Kassan Messiah: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.7

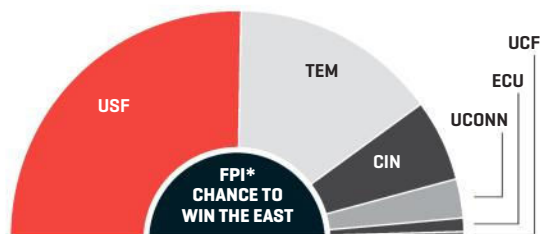
● **FPI CHANCE MASSACHUSETTS WINS**

9/3 @ Florida **1%** ● 9/10 vs. Boston College [Foxborough] **8%** ● 9/17 vs. Florida International **43%** ● 9/24 vs. Mississippi State [Foxborough] **3%** ● 10/1 vs. Tulane [Foxborough] **38%** ● 10/8 @ Old Dominion **24%** ● 10/15 vs. Louisiana Tech [Foxborough] **27%** ● 10/22 @ South Carolina **2%** ● 10/29 vs. Wagner **95%** ● 11/5 @ Troy **13%** ● 11/12 BYE ● 11/19 @ BYU **3%** ● 11/26 @ Hawaii **17%**

FIRE

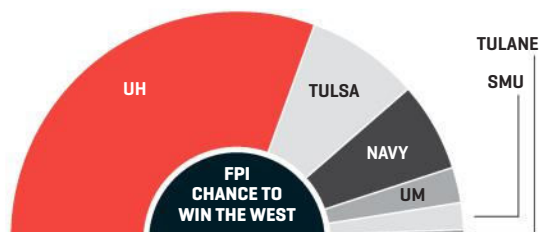
AAC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SOUTH FLORIDA	44	51.0%
TEMPLE	63	29.1%
CINCINNATI	70	12.2%
CONNECTICUT	84	5.5%
EAST CAROLINA	94	1.7%
CENTRAL FLORIDA	100	0.6%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
HOUSTON	48	61.4%
TULSA	78	16.1%
NAVY	82	12.6%
MEMPHIS	85	5.2%
SMU	91	4.1%
TULANE	106	0.6%



SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/BETTY IMAGES

AVERAGE
FPI RANK
78.8

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
35%
SOUTH
FLORIDA

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **Greg Ward Jr.** Sr. Houston

ALL-AAC

QB **Greg Ward Jr.** Sr. Houston
 RB **Marlon Mack** Jr. South Florida
 RB **Jahad Thomas** Sr. Temple
 WR **Zay Jones** Sr. East Carolina
 WR **Keevan Lucas** Sr. Tulsa
 TE **Alec Bloom** Jr. Connecticut
 OL **Will Noble** So. Houston
 OL **Ryan Leahy** Sr. Cincinnati
 OL **J.T. Boyd** Sr. East Carolina
 OL **Dion Dawkins** Sr. Temple
 OL **Kofi Amichia** Sr. South Florida

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LB **Steven Taylor** Sr. Houston

ALL-AAC

DL **Haason Reddick** Sr. Temple
 DL **Folorunso Fatukasi** Jr. Connecticut
 DL **Tanzel Smart** Sr. Tulane
 DL **Demetri McGill** Sr. East Carolina
 LB **Nico Marley** Sr. Tulane
 LB **Steven Taylor** Sr. Houston
 LB **Auggie Sanchez** Jr. South Florida
 CB **Jamar Summers** Jr. Connecticut
 CB **Deatrick Nichols** Jr. South Florida
 S **Zach Edwards** Sr. Cincinnati
 S **Travon Simmons** Jr. East Carolina

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Jake Elliott** Sr. Memphis
 P **Spencer Smith** Jr. Memphis
 RS **Rodney Adams** Sr. South Florida

Greg Ward Jr.

Ward, Houston's first 1,000-yard rushing QB, also threw for 2,828 and rang up 38 total TDs.



1 South Florida

COACH Willie Taggart (4th season)
14-23 (0-1 in bowl games)

With 15 starters back and a dynamic backfield led by RB Marlon Mack and QB Quinton Flowers, USF is favored in all but a game vs. its rival in Tallahassee. —Gus Elvin

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Marlon Mack**
Mack, a 6-foot, 205-pound junior, ran for a school-record 1,381 yards last year and led the conference in rushing, averaging 6.6 yards a carry with 13 runs of more than 20 yards.

🔴 **X-FACTOR WR Rodney Adams**
Adams led the Bulls in receptions (45) and yards (822) and tied for the conference lead in TD receptions with nine, including four of 50-plus yards.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Offensive line**
With three vets gone who combined for 79 starts, Jeremi Hall and Cameron Ruff will compete at left guard, while Reilly Gibbons and juco transfer Glen Bethel will battle at right tackle.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Flowers and Mack combined for almost 2,400 yards rushing and 20 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE ONE-TWO PUNCH?** “They do a lot of things out of the option and the zone read. They make you pick your poison on defense.” —AAC head coach

🔴 Deatrick Nichols led the team in interceptions (four) and forced fumbles (two) and also recorded 8½ tackles for loss. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NICHOLS?** “They attack the football and play with a lot of speed, effort and aggression, and Nichols is a defensive back with a lot of confidence. He isn’t just an interception guy either. He’s a player who makes plays at each level.” —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (6-2)
BOWL GAME Miami Beach Bowl
vs. Western Kentucky, 45-35 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Quinton Flowers: **2,296 yards**
RUSHING Marlon Mack: **1,381 yards**
RECEIVING Rodney Adams: **822 yards**
TACKLES Auggie Sanchez: **117**
SACKS Eric Lee: 5
INTERCEPTIONS Deatrick Nichols: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.7
● **FPI CHANCE SOUTH FLORIDA WINS**

9/3 vs. Towson **97%** ● **9/10** vs. Northern Illinois **80%** ● **9/17** @ Syracuse **52%** ● **9/24** vs. Florida State **11%** ● **10/1** @ Cincinnati **57%** ● **10/8** vs. East Carolina **87%** ● **10/15** vs. Connecticut **82%** ● **10/21** @ Temple **54%** ● **10/28** vs. Navy **81%** ● **11/5** BYE ● **11/12** @ Memphis **73%** ● **11/19** @ SMU **73%** ● **11/26** vs. Central Florida **90%**

2 Temple

COACH Matt Rhule (4th season)
18-20 (0-1 in bowl games)

After winning 10 games for just the second time in its history, Temple looks to build on last season’s success with six returning starters on each side of the ball. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON QB P.J. Walker**
Walker, a senior with 33 starts, holds school records for TD passes (52) and total offense (8,237 yards), and with 7,374 passing yards, he’s 121 short of the school record.

🔴 **X-FACTOR MLB Jarrod Alwan**
Alwan had 74 tackles and four forced fumbles last season. He’ll be counted on to help replace Bednarik Award winner Tyler Matakevich.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Safety**
Delvon Randall should slide into the starting spot vacated by All-AAC safety Alex Wells; the question is who will earn the other starting safety position, Khiry Lucas or Nate L. Smith.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Temple is old-school and runs between the tackles, and the Owls were in the top two in the AAC in run, pass, scoring and total defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THIS TEAM’S IDENTITY?** “They are one of the most hard-nosed, physical football teams we have played. They like to run the ball, and their quarterback and running back run downhill effectively.” —AAC head coach

🔴 Over the past three years, Temple has gradually improved from two wins to six to 10 last season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEMPLE’S EMERGENCE UNDER MATT RHULE?** “He has done an unbelievable job rebuilding that program. Matt really preached, sold and changed the culture there.” —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-4 (7-1)
BOWL GAME Marmot Boca Raton Bowl
vs. Toledo, 32-17 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING P.J. Walker: **2,973 yards**
RUSHING Jahad Thomas: **1,262 yards**
RECEIVING Robby Anderson: 939 yards
TACKLES Tyler Matakevich: 138
SACKS Nate D. Smith: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Tyler Matakevich: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.3
● **FPI CHANCE TEMPLE WINS**

9/2 vs. Army **81%** ● **9/10** vs. Stony Brook **97%** ● **9/17** @ Penn State **21%** ● **9/24** vs. Charlotte **94%** ● **10/1** vs. Southern Methodist **78%** ● **10/6** @ Memphis **55%** ● **10/15** @ Central Florida **71%** ● **10/21** vs. South Florida **46%** ● **10/29** vs. Cincinnati **62%** ● **11/4** @ Connecticut **55%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** @ Tulane **77%** ● **11/26** vs. East Carolina **76%**

3 Cincinnati

COACH Tommy Tuberville [4th season]
25–14 [0–3 in bowl games]

The Bearcats return eight starters on D but need steadier hands at QB (22 interceptions) to open things up for big-play RBs Mike Boone and Tion Green. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Mike Boone

The 5-foot-11, 201-pound Boone (7.2 yards per carry) will be the featured back this season and could be a breakout player as the Bearcats try to recommit to a running game.

X-FACTOR WR Devin Gray

The Bearcats lost six receivers who each had more than 450 yards last season. Gray caught 69 balls for 1,154 yards and 11 TDs last year at Sierra College in California.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Senior Gunner Kiel (23 starts in two years) continues to be pushed by sophomore Hayden Moore (eight games) in hopes of reducing the team's disastrous 33 turnovers (T124 in the BCS).

THE PRESSER

Boone had 104 carries for 749 yards and nine TDs last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT BOONE?** "He's a bigger back and a very powerful runner who is very difficult to bring down. You have to hit him before he gets his momentum going and tackle him well with multiple guys." —AAC head coach

Safety Zach Edwards was Cincinnati's best player on defense a year ago with 93 tackles, three interceptions and eight passes broken up. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT EDWARDS?** "He is smart, seemingly always in good position and not one to shy away from contact. He makes plays at all three levels and is a ball hawk for them in the secondary." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 [4–4]

BOWL GAME Sheraton Hawaii Bowl vs. San Diego State, 42–7 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Gunner Kiel: 2,777 yards

RUSHING Hosey Williams: 777 yards

RECEIVING Shaq Washington: 982 yards

TACKLES Eric Wilson: 106

SACKS Silverberry Mouhon: 4½

INTERCEPTIONS Zach Edwards: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0

● **FPI CHANCE CINCINNATI WINS**

9/1 vs. UT Martin 94% ● 9/10 @ Purdue 41% ● 9/15 vs. Houston 45% ● 9/24 vs. Miami [Ohio] 86% ● 10/1 vs. South Florida 43% ● 10/8 @ Connecticut 49% ● 10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. East Carolina 79% ● 10/29 @ Temple 38% ● 11/5 vs. BYU 40% ● 11/12 @ Central Florida 65% ● 11/18 vs. Memphis 70% ● 11/25 @ Tulsa 46%

4 Connecticut

COACH Bob Diaco [3rd season]
8–17 [0–1 in bowl games]

Dual-threat QB Bryant Shirreffs runs an offense that returns 10 starters, its top five receivers and its top three rushers. The opportunistic D? A bit more turnover. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Arkeel Newsome

Newsome, a 5-foot-7, 180-pound junior, led the AAC with 1,686 all-purpose yards as a sophomore, including two 100-yard rushing performances in the Huskies' final five games.

X-FACTOR CB Jamar Summers

The junior collected 8 INTs (T2 in the FBS) and 39 tackles for a pass defense that led the AAC and was ranked 20th nationally, allowing just 189.3 passing yards per game.

POSITION BATTLE Outside linebacker

Junior Vontae Diggs, senior Omaine Stephens and redshirt freshman Nazir Williams are battling it out for the only open linebacker spot in Bob Diaco's 3–4 scheme.

THE PRESSER

Newsome was UConn's leading rusher (792 yards), its second-leading receiver (465 yards) and its top kick returner (429 yards). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEWSOME?** "He has great vision and runs hard and physically despite not being very big. He is a complete back, and he also has such great hands." —AAC head coach

The Huskies' pass defense was tied for 12th nationally with 18 interceptions (4.5 percent of opponents' attempts, eighth in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR PASS D?** "They are assignment-sound and often drop all four of their linebackers into coverage. It's very hard to find windows to throw into when eight guys drop." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 [4–4]

BOWL GAME St. Petersburg Bowl vs. Marshall, 16–10 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Bryant Shirreffs: 2,078 yards

RUSHING Arkeel Newsome: 792 yards

RECEIVING Noel Thomas: 719 yards

TACKLES Andrew Adams: 103

SACKS Folorunso Fatukasi: 7½

INTERCEPTIONS Jamar Summers: 8

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0

● **FPI CHANCE CONNECTICUT WINS**

9/1 vs. Maine 95% ● 9/10 @ Navy 42% ● 9/17 vs. Virginia 46% ● 9/24 vs. Syracuse 45% ● 9/29 @ Houston 18% ● 10/8 vs. Cincinnati 51% ● 10/15 @ South Florida 18% ● 10/22 vs. Central Florida 77% ● 10/29 @ East Carolina 52% ● 11/4 vs. Temple 45% ● 11/12 BYE ● 11/19 @ Boston College 26% ● 11/26 vs. Tulane 80%

5 East Carolina

COACH Scottie Montgomery (1st season)

After a 5-7 season marred by key injuries and offensive struggles, ECU hired former Duke OC Scottie Montgomery, who inherits an athletic roster. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Zay Jones

One of the top returning receivers in the nation, the senior hauled in 98 passes for 1,099 yards and five touchdowns last season.

X-FACTOR OLB Yiannis Bowden

The 6-foot-5, 225-pound sophomore registered 3½ sacks and an interception and is expected to be an impact player off the edge.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Kurt Benkert's transfer to UVa put a likely end to the QB question—enter Philip Nelson, a transfer himself via Minnesota—so the focus shifts to RB. Junior Anthony Scott is the vet but had only 49 carries in '15; expect reps for soph Shawn Furlow and Tennessee transfer Derrell Scott.

THE PRESSER

At Duke, Montgomery ran balanced offenses with mobile QBs like Thomas Sirk (803 yards rushing in 2015). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MONTGOMERY'S STYLE?** "I can tell you right now that ECU will be well-coached on offense. ECU isn't a rebuild either, as they have a lot of good players returning at the skill positions." —AAC head coach

The Pirates ranked in the top half of the AAC in sacks with 25. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ECU'S DEFENSIVE FRONT?** "Defensive line is one area where they have stood out the last few years. They're not only big, strong and athletic, but they play hard. They have more than three or four guys who get after it up there." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 (3-5)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Blake Kemp: 2,658 yards

RUSHING Chris Hairston: 754 yards

RECEIVING Zay Jones: 1,099 yards

TACKLES Zeek Bigger: 98

SACKS Montese Overton: 7½

INTERCEPTIONS Josh Hawkins: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4

● **FPI CHANCE EAST CAROLINA WINS**

9/3 vs. Western Carolina 91% ● 9/10 vs. NC State 20% ● 9/17 @ South Carolina 10% ● 9/24 @ Virginia Tech 11% ● 10/1 vs. Central Florida 67% ● 10/8 @ South Florida 13% ● 10/13 vs. Navy 46% ● 10/22 @ Cincinnati 21% ● 10/29 vs. Connecticut 48% ● 11/5 @ Tulsa 26% ● 11/12 vs. Southern Methodist 58% ● 11/19 BYE ● 11/26 @ Temple 24%

6 Central Florida

COACH Scott Frost (1st season)

The winless Knights ranked near the bottom nationally in most key categories. Can Scott Frost blow things up with the explosive offense he brings from Oregon? —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Tre'Quan Smith

The 2015 AAC freshman of the year, Smith led the Knights in receptions (52), receiving yards (724) and receiving TDs (four) and was one of the team's few bright spots.

X-FACTOR RB Taj McGowan

McGowan, a sophomore, ran for just 262 yards last year, but at 6-foot-1, 198 pounds, he has breakaway speed that suits Frost's offense.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Senior Justin Holman started 21 games over the past two seasons and in 2014 threw for nearly 3,000 yards with 23 TDs. Senior Nick Patti has played WR and QB in a wildcat role but has thrown just 22 passes in two seasons.

THE PRESSER

Oregon played fast, ranking eighth nationally with just 21.4 seconds per offensive snap. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FROST'S PLAY-CALLING TEMPO?** "Playing an offense like that presents many challenges, as you need to be well-conditioned, simple in your schemes and playcalls. The simpler the game plan and more guys you can rotate in, the better." —AAC head coach

Jamius Pittman, a 300-pound defensive tackle, led the team in sacks (4½) and anchored the run defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JAMIYUS PITTMAN?** "That is one strong kid in the middle of that defense. What makes him special is the pad level, leverage and motor he plays with." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 0-12 (0-8)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Justin Holman: 1,379 yards

RUSHING C.J. Jones: 339 yards

RECEIVING Tre'Quan Smith: 724 yards

TACKLES Domenic Spencer: 104

SACKS Jamius Pittman: 4½

INTERCEPTIONS Shaquill Griffin: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.2

● **FPI CHANCE CENTRAL FLORIDA WINS**

9/3 vs. South Carolina State 92% ● 9/10 @ Michigan 3% ● 9/17 vs. Maryland 34% ● 9/24 @ Florida International 52% ● 10/1 @ East Carolina 33% ● 10/7 vs. Tulane 63% ● 10/15 vs. Temple 29% ● 10/22 @ Connecticut 23% ● 10/29 @ Houston 10% ● 11/5 BYE ● 11/12 vs. Cincinnati 35% ● 11/19 vs. Tulsa 37% ● 11/26 @ South Florida 10%

1 Houston

Tom Herman won a conference title and the Peach Bowl in his debut season. This year he has to replace six starters on O, but star QB Greg Ward Jr. returns. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Greg Ward Jr.

Ward ranked second in the nation in both rushing yards [1,108] and rushing touchdowns [21] by a quarterback. He also led the AAC with a Total QBR of 80.3.

● X-FACTOR RB Duke Catalan

Catalan, a 6-foot, 210-pound transfer from Texas and former four-star recruit out of Houston, gave the scout team fits last year as a redshirt freshman, Herman says.

● POSITION BATTLE Cornerback

Brandon Wilson, Jesse Winchester and J.J. Dallas are fighting for a starting job at cornerback, part of a secondary that lost three all-conference players from last year.

THE PRESSER

● Ward accounted for 3,936 yards and 38 touchdowns last season, ranking third in the conference in total yards and first in TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WARD?** “Ward is a great, great player. I think he was the toughest guy to defend in the conference. His legs can be the difference in a game.” —AAC head coach

● Last season Houston led the nation with 35 takeaways, racking up 21 interceptions and forcing 14 fumbles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOUSTON’S DEFENSE?** “[Defensive coordinator Todd] Orlando is a great coach. It’s obvious that [turnovers are] an emphasis of theirs because they are all over the place on defense.” —AAC head coach

COACH Tom Herman [2nd season]
13–1 [1–0 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 13–1 [7–1]
BOWL GAME Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl
vs. Florida State, 38–24 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Greg Ward Jr.: **2,828 yards**
RUSHING Greg Ward Jr.: **1,108 yards**
RECEIVING Demarcus Ayers: 1,222 yards
TACKLES Elandon Roberts: 142
SACKS Steven Taylor: **10**
INTERCEPTIONS William Jackson III: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.5
● **FPI CHANCE HOUSTON WINS**

9/3 vs. Oklahoma [NRG Stadium, Houston] **9%**
● **9/10** vs. Lamar **98%** ● **9/15** @ Cincinnati **55%** ● **9/24** @ Texas State **93%** ● **9/29** vs. Connecticut **82%** ● **10/8** @ Navy **63%** ● **10/15** vs. Tulsa **76%** ● **10/22** @ SMU **70%** ● **10/29** vs. Central Florida **90%** ● **11/5** BYE
● **11/12** vs. Tulane **91%** ● **11/17** vs. Louisville **28%** ● **11/25** @ Memphis **68%**

2 Tulsa

Tulsa averaged 507 yards of total offense (No. 13 in the FBS), and with senior QB Dane Evans back for more, the Golden Hurricane look bowl-worthy once again. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Dane Evans

The 6-foot-1, 210-pound senior threw 25 TDs and completed 63 percent of his passes with just eight picks. He threw for 427 yards and four TDs with no interceptions at Oklahoma.

● X-FACTOR WR Keevan Lucas

Lucas suffered a season-ending knee injury in Tulsa’s fourth game but led the Golden Hurricane in 2014 with 101 catches for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns.

● POSITION BATTLE Guard

Tulsa will be young on the offensive line with redshirt freshman Tristan Wyatt, sophomore Tyler Bowling and juco transfer Deya Mhiesen trying to fill both guard spots.

THE PRESSER

● Tulsa ranked 11th in passing offense (333.2 ypg) and tied for seventh nationally with 69 passing plays of 20 or more yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TULSA’S OFFENSE?** “Montgomery is well-respected. His tempo and his willingness to take the top off the defense vertically is tough to defend. Evans can stretch the field.” —AAC head coach

● Opponents liked to attack the Golden Hurricane’s 117th-ranked run defense (239.7 ypg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RUNNING ON THEM?** “Tulsa is a team that likes to get in offensive shootouts, and by running the ball and avoiding quick possessions, you allow your defense time to rest and keep their explosive offense on the sideline.” —AAC head coach

COACH Philip Montgomery [2nd season]
6–7 [0–1 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 [3–5]
BOWL GAME Camping World Independence Bowl
vs. Virginia Tech, 55–52 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Dane Evans: **4,332 yards**
RUSHING D’Angelo Brewer: **837 yards**
RECEIVING Keyarris Garrett: 1,588 yards
TACKLES Michael Mudoh: 135
SACKS Matt Linscott: **5**
INTERCEPTIONS Jeremy Brady: **2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.9
● **FPI CHANCE TULSA WINS**

9/3 vs. San Jose State **61%** ● **9/10** @ Ohio State **8%** ● **9/17** vs. North Carolina A&T **95%** ● **9/24** @ Fresno State **65%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/7** vs. SMU **73%** ● **10/15** @ Houston **24%** ● **10/22** vs. Tulane **82%** ● **10/29** @ Memphis **49%** ● **11/5** vs. East Carolina **74%** ● **11/12** @ Navy **43%** ● **11/19** @ Central Florida **63%** ● **11/25** vs. Cincinnati **54%**

3 Navy

Ken Niumatalolo coached Navy to 11 wins, a first in program history. This year his vaunted triple-option attack has a new captain: Tago Smith. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON QB Tago Smith**
Smith, a senior, has to follow four-year starter Keenan Reynolds, but Niumatalolo likes his athleticism. Smith has played in 19 games, tallying 294 yards on 70 rushes and nine total TDs.

🔴 **X-FACTOR WR Jamir Tillman**
When the Midshipmen do throw the ball [9.2 attempts per game], they throw it deep to Tillman. He made 29 of Navy's 64 catches for 597 yards and five TDs.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Fullback**
Navy loses five of its top six rushers. Shawn White [6-1, 255] and Chris High [6-0, 224] are leading candidates at fullback but combined for just 24 carries and 115 yards in 2015.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Last year the Midshipmen tied for second in the nation with 326.7 rushing ypg and featured five players who rushed for over 300 yards.

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLAYING NAVY'S TRIPLE-OPTION? "You just don't see it a lot. It's hard to get guys to lock in on gap responsibilities, especially with the short weeks we have during the season." —AAC head coach

🔴 Navy tries to neutralize a lack of size through scheme and mixing defenses. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NAVY'S DEFENSE?** "They are multiple and can go base 3-4 and then line up a play later and go 4-3. They run different blitzes and pressures from different areas and constantly change it up, which makes it tough to decipher." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11-2 [7-1]
BOWL GAME Military Bowl presented by Northrop Grumman vs. Pittsburgh, 44-28 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Keenan Reynolds: 1,203 yards
RUSHING Keenan Reynolds: 1,373 yards
RECEIVING Jamir Tillman: 597 yards
TACKLES Lorentez Barbour: 74
SACKS Will Anthony: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS Brendon Clements: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1

🔴 **FPI CHANCE NAVY WINS**

9/3 vs. Fordham 92% ● 9/10 vs. Connecticut 58% ● 9/17 @ Tulane 64% ● 9/24 BYE ● 10/1 @ Air Force 33% ● 10/8 vs. Houston 37% ● 10/13 @ East Carolina 54% ● 10/22 vs. Memphis 64% ● 10/28 @ South Florida 19% ● 11/5 vs. Notre Dame [Jacksonville, Fla.] 10% ● 11/12 vs. Tulsa 57% ● 11/19 BYE ● 11/26 @ SMU 52% ● 12/10 vs. Army [Baltimore] 65%

4 Memphis

The Tigers won 19 games the past two years, but former Arizona State OC Mike Norvell replaces Justin Fuente as Memphis begins life after Paxton Lynch. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Doroland Dorceus**
Dorceus, a junior, was Memphis' top all-around back last season, rushing for 661 yards and eight TDs while adding 217 receiving yards and three TD catches.

🔴 **X-FACTOR LB Genard Avery**
Avery, a 6-foot-1, 255-pound junior, had 53 tackles, 6½ TFLs and three sacks, and he will be counted on as a leader, with Memphis losing three senior linebackers to graduation.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Juco transfer Riley Ferguson [formerly of Tennessee], redshirt freshman Brady Davis and fifth-year senior Jason Stewart all have a shot to replace Lynch.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Memphis was third in the AAC in total offense [487 ypg] and second in ppg [40.2].

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NORVELL'S STYLE COMPARED TO FUENTE'S? "I know he likes to play with pace and tempo. They have good receivers, and Mike does a good job in the passing game. We expect them to be a dangerous offense." —AAC head coach

🔴 Memphis ranked fourth in the conference with 26 sacks but gave up 48 pass plays of 20 or more yards, third most. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "They blitzed and brought a lot of guys in pressure but were susceptible in the secondary. When we protected our quarterback, there were often receivers free downfield." —AAC head coach

COACH Mike Norvell [1st season]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 [5-3]
BOWL GAME Birmingham Bowl vs. Auburn, 31-10 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Paxton Lynch: 3,776 yards
RUSHING Doroland Dorceus: 661 yards
RECEIVING Mose Frazier: 797 yards
TACKLES Leonard Pegues: 75
SACKS Christian Johnson: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Reggie Ball: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7

🔴 **FPI CHANCE MEMPHIS WINS**

9/3 vs. Southeast Missouri State 95% ● 9/10 BYE ● 9/17 vs. Kansas 80% ● 9/24 vs. Bowling Green 64% ● 10/1 @ Mississippi 4% ● 10/6 vs. Temple 45% ● 10/14 @ Tulane 63% ● 10/22 @ Navy 36% ● 10/29 vs. Tulsa 51% ● 11/5 @ SMU 47% ● 11/12 vs. South Florida 28% ● 11/18 @ Cincinnati 30% ● 11/25 vs. Houston 32%

5 SMU

COACH Chad Morris (2nd season)
2-10 (0-0 in bowl games)

Chad Morris says his incoming freshmen will make this “a whole different team come August.” Good thing: The D gave up 45.7 ppg and the O surrendered 41 sacks. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Courtland Sutton

The 6-foot-4 sophomore ranked fifth nationally among freshmen with 862 receiving yards and tied for the conference lead with nine TD receptions.

X-FACTOR WR James Proche

The SMU staff loves Proche's speed and hopes the redshirt freshman from Dallas and classmate Alex Honey will complement Sutton.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Matt Davis (26 total TDs, 14 turnovers last year) is trying to hold off redshirt freshman Ben Hicks and sophomore Darrel Colbert Jr. Hicks was a touted prospect, while Colbert appeared in seven games.

THE PRESSER

Sutton broke out with two TDs against Baylor in his first game and 115 yards and a TD two weeks later on the road against TCU. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SUTTON?** “He’s a *dude*. He’s a bigger receiver who you can just throw the ball up to and he’ll go get it. I hope he leaves after three years just so I don’t have to worry about trying to stop him another year.” —AAC head coach

DE Justin Lawler led the Mustangs in tackles (65), tackles for loss (10) and sacks (five). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWLER?** “He’s a big, long kid who is very strong and very physical with a motor. He kept coming. He’s another young guy who has a bright future in this league.” —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Matt Davis: 2,263 yards
RUSHING Matt Davis: 761 yards
RECEIVING Courtland Sutton: 862 yards
TACKLES Justin Lawler: 65
SACKS Justin Lawler: 5
INTERCEPTIONS Jordan Wyatt: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0

● **FPI CHANCE SMU WINS**

9/3 @ North Texas 80% ● 9/10 @ Baylor 5% ● 9/17 vs. Liberty 92% ● 9/23 vs. TCU 16% ● 10/1 @ Temple 22% ● 10/7 @ Tulsa 27% ● 10/15 BYE ● 10/22 vs. Houston 30% ● 10/29 @ Tulane 56% ● 11/5 vs. Memphis 53% ● 11/12 @ East Carolina 42% ● 11/19 vs. South Florida 27% ● 11/26 vs. Navy 48%

6 Tulane

COACH Willie Fritz (1st season)

After back-to-back 3-9 seasons, Tulane turns to Georgia Southern's Willie Fritz and his .692 career winning percentage in hopes of a turnaround. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RBs Sherman Badie and Dontrell Hilliard

Badie and Hilliard have both rushed for more than 600 yards in a season and each should see more carries in an offense designed to run the football with multiple backs.

X-FACTOR DE Ade Aruna

The 6-foot-5, 241-pound junior had 32 stops and three sacks last fall. The line should be an area of strength in new DC Jack Curtis' 4-3.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Senior Devin Powell (four starts) is a dropback passer, while sophomore Glen Cuiellette and freshman Darius Bradwell are athletic types, which Fritz prefers in his option attack.

THE PRESSER

In two years at Georgia Southern, Fritz rotated two QBs who combined to average 1,388 yards rushing per year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FRITZ'S OFFENSE?** “Having the quarterback as a ball carrier requires you to assign a defender to take away the quarterback's legs, which creates a numerical advantage for the offense.” —AAC head coach

Undersized (5-10, 208) but productive (82 tackles, 13 TFLs), All-AAC LB Nico Marley plays a lot like dad Rohan did at Miami. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MARLEY?** “Every time I turn on tape of Tulane, I see him running all over the football field and making plays. He plays the game the way I believe football should be played.” —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Tanner Lee: 1,639 yards
RUSHING Dontrell Hilliard: 646 yards
RECEIVING Teddy Veal: 644 yards
TACKLES Nico Marley: 82
SACKS Royce LaFrance: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Darion Monroe: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4

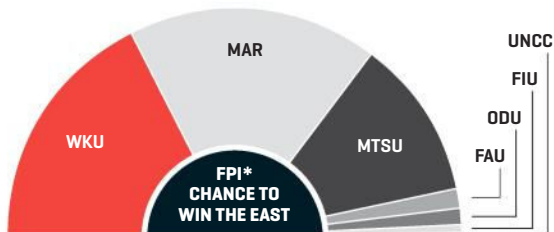
● **FPI CHANCE TULANE WINS**

9/1 @ Wake Forest 12% ● 9/10 vs. Southern 96% ● 9/17 vs. Navy 36% ● 9/24 vs. UL Lafayette 49% ● 10/1 @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) 62% ● 10/7 @ Central Florida 37% ● 10/14 vs. Memphis 37% ● 10/22 @ Tulsa 18% ● 10/29 vs. SMU 44% ● 11/5 BYE ● 11/12 @ Houston 9% ● 11/19 vs. Temple 23% ● 11/26 @ Connecticut 20%

C-USA

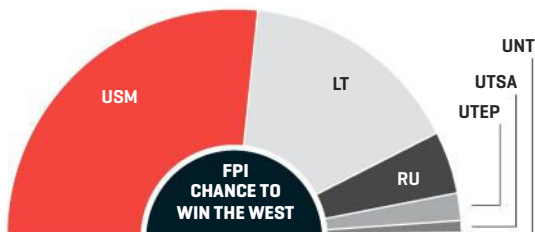
Conference USA outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WESTERN KENTUCKY	69	35.3%
MARSHALL	76	35.3%
MIDDLE TENNESSEE	86	23.0%
FLORIDA ATLANTIC	109	2.5%
OLD DOMINION	111	2.3%
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL	116	1.4%
CHARLOTTE	125	0.1%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SOUTHERN MISS	89	53.6%
LOUISIANA TECH	93	31.4%
RICE	114	9.2%
UTEP	122	3.7%
UTSA	123	1.7%
NORTH TEXAS	128	0.4%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
104.7

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
26%
WESTERN
KENTUCKY

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB **Nick Mullens** Sr. Southern Miss

ALL-C-USA

QB	Nick Mullens	Sr.	Southern Miss
RB	Ray Lawry	Jr.	Old Dominion
RB	Ito Smith	Jr.	Southern Miss
WR	Taywan Taylor	Sr.	Western Kentucky
WR	Richie James	So.	Middle Tennessee
TE	Jonnu Smith	Sr.	Florida International
OL	Cameron Tom	Sr.	Southern Miss
OL	Brandon Ray	Jr.	Western Kentucky
OL	Will Hernandez	Jr.	UTEP
OL	Forrest Lamp	Sr.	Western Kentucky
OL	Reggie Bain	Jr.	Florida Atlantic

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE **Trey Hendrickson** Sr. Florida Atlantic

ALL-C-USA

DE	Trey Hendrickson	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
DE	Gary Thompson	Sr.	Marshall
DT	Larry Ogunjobi	Sr.	Charlotte
DT	Kevin Strong Jr.	So.	UTSA
LB	Alvin Jones	Jr.	UTEP
LB	TJ Ricks	Sr.	Old Dominion
LB	T.J. McCollum	Jr.	Western Kentucky
CB	Jeremy Cutrer	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
CB	Cornell Armstrong	Jr.	Southern Miss
S	Xavier Woods	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
S	Kishawn McClain	Jr.	North Texas

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	Jonathan Barnes	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
P	Dalton Schomp	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
RS	Carlos Henderson	Jr.	Louisiana Tech

Nick Mullens

The C-USA offensive player of the year threw 38 TDs for Southern Miss, tied for first among returning FBS QBs.



1 Western Kentucky

Last year WKU scored 44.3 ppg (third in the FBS) and 82 TDs. But 5,000-yard passer Brandon Doughty is gone, so the offense might slow down—a little. —Ben Arledge

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Taywan Taylor

Taylor caught 86 passes for 1,467 yards last year, tops in Conference USA and third in the FBS. His 17 TD catches was second nationally.

X-FACTOR RB Leon Allen

WKU returns Anthony Wales (1,091 yards) and D'Andre Ferby (650 yards). But Allen, whose 2015 season ended with a knee injury in Week 2, rushed for 1,542 yards in 2014.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Nelson Fishback has thrown 26 career passes as Doughty's backup and could enter as the starter. However, a pair of transfers, Mike White (South Florida) and Tyler Ferguson (Louisville/Penn State), could push him.

THE PRESSER

WKU gained the nation's ninth-most yards (526.4 per game), despite holding the ball for only about 30 minutes (58th in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO SLOW WKU DOWN?** "If you try to get in a scoring competition with them, you're going to get beat. You want 12- to 16-play, six- or seven-minute drives. —Conference USA head coach

Only Air Force had more plays of 50-plus yards than Western Kentucky's 17 in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSE?** "They throw little bubble screens; we're jumping inside when we aren't supposed to, and they are going down the sideline. You have to tackle when you have an opportunity to tackle." —Conference USA head coach

COACH Jeff Brohm (3rd season)
20-7 (2-0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12-2 (8-0)
BOWL GAME Miami Beach Bowl
vs. South Florida, 45-35 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brandon Doughty: 5,055 yards
RUSHING Anthony Wales: **1,091 yards**
RECEIVING Taywan Taylor: **1,467 yards**
TACKLES T.J. McCollum: **106**
SACKS Nick Holt: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Prince Charles Iworah: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.5

● **FPI CHANCE WESTERN KENTUCKY WINS**

9/1 vs. Rice **88%** ● 9/10 @ Alabama **5%** ● 9/17 @ Miami (Ohio) **77%** ● 9/24 vs. Vanderbilt **50%** ● 10/1 vs. Houston Baptist **99%** ● 10/6 @ Louisiana Tech **62%** ● 10/15 @ Middle Tennessee **52%** ● 10/22 vs. Old Dominion **85%** ● 10/29 @ Florida Atlantic **71%** ● 11/5 vs. Florida International **88%** ● 11/12 vs. North Texas **95%** ● 11/19 BYE ● 11/26 @ Marshall **49%**

2 Marshall

Marshall's strength is its defense, which allowed just 17.8 ppg (10th in the FBS). But 6-foot-6 sophomore QB Chase Litton offers a high ceiling on offense. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DL Gary Thompson

The 6-foot-1, 252-pound senior led the team with nine sacks, second best in Conference USA. He'll anchor the Herd's pass rush along with sophomore Ryan Bee (8½ TFLs, four sacks).

X-FACTOR QB Chase Litton

Litton's 54.3 QBR was fifth in the conference. Marshall threw on just 50.9 percent of plays, so Litton could shoulder more of the load.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Hyleck Foster, a converted receiver, rushed for 122 yards against Florida Atlantic in his first game at RB. He averaged 4.5 ypc on 100 attempts but will have to compete with junior Tony Pittman and sophomore Keion Davis.

THE PRESSER

As a freshman, Litton completed 60.1 percent of his passes and was pressured on 6 percent of all dropbacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LITTON?** "Litton is a rising star in this league. You have to pressure him and collapse the pocket on him because he doesn't run the ball well." —Conference USA head coach

Marshall held 26.8 percent of opponents' red zone drives to no points, ninth best nationally. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SCORING ON THE HERD?** "You can't beat a team like Marshall by kicking field goals. They have the ability to score a lot of points themselves, so you have to be really good in the red zone against them." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (6-2)
BOWL GAME St. Petersburg Bowl
vs. Connecticut, 16-10 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Chase Litton: **2,605 yards**
RUSHING Devon Johnson: 593 yards
RECEIVING Davonte Allen: 715 yards
TACKLES Evan McKelvey: 121
SACKS Gary Thompson: **9**
INTERCEPTIONS Rodney Allen: **3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.1

● **FPI CHANCE MARSHALL WINS**

9/3 BYE ● 9/10 vs. Morgan State **99%** ● 9/17 vs. Akron **85%** ● 9/24 vs. Louisville **15%** ● 10/1 @ Pittsburgh **14%** ● 10/8 @ North Texas **87%** ● 10/15 vs. Florida Atlantic **84%** ● 10/22 vs. Charlotte **92%** ● 10/29 @ Southern Miss **51%** ● 11/5 @ Old Dominion **73%** ● 11/12 vs. Middle Tennessee **67%** ● 11/19 @ Florida International **71%** ● 11/26 vs. Western Kentucky **51%**

3 Middle Tennessee

COACH Rick Stockstill [11th season]
64-61 [1-4 in bowl games]

The No. 15 air attack in the FBS (311.7 ypg) returns its QB, top WR and flex TE. But with only five starters back on D, the Blue Raiders should be in shootouts this fall. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON QB Brent Stockstill**
Coach Rick Stockstill's son was the only freshman in the country to throw for 4,000 yards, and his 77.7 QBR was the nation's 19th best. He threw 30 TDs to 9 INTs and had 66 completions for 20 or more yards.

🔴 **X-FACTOR TE Terry Pettis**
The senior twice exploded for over 125 yards and at least a score but also disappeared for under 20 yards and no TDs in three games.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Running back**
Ole Miss transfer I'Tavius Mathers averaged 5.6 ypc for the Rebels over three years. He could get the starting job over Shane Tucker and Desmond Anderson.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Stockstill found WR Richie James a conference-high 108 times for 1,346 yards and eight TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DUO?** "That quarterback is really, really good. You can tell it's the coach's son because he plays like a coach out there. And [James is] going to get his catches; he did against everybody." —Conference USA head coach

🔴 The Blue Raiders hauled in 17 interceptions and forced 25 turnovers, blanketing the field. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR DEFENSE?** "From front to back, left to right, we thought this defense might be the most athletic in the league. They just had guys all over the field who had size and could run." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 [6-2]
BOWL GAME Popeyes Bahamas Bowl vs. Western Michigan, 45-31 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Brent Stockstill: **4,005 yards**
RUSHING Jordan Parker: 470 yards
RECEIVING Richie James: **1,346 yards**
TACKLES T.T. Barber: 89
SACKS Chris Hale: **4**
INTERCEPTIONS Kevin Byard: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.5
🔴 **FPI CHANCE MIDDLE TENNESSEE WINS**

9/3 vs. Alabama A&M **99%** ● **9/10** @ Vanderbilt **24%** ● **9/17** @ Bowling Green **46%** ● **9/24** vs. Louisiana Tech **66%** ● **10/1** @ North Texas **83%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Western Kentucky **48%** ● **10/22** @ Missouri **20%** ● **10/29** @ Florida International **66%** ● **11/5** vs. UTSA **90%** ● **11/12** @ Marshall **33%** ● **11/19** @ Charlotte **81%** ● **11/26** vs. Florida Atlantic **79%**

4 Florida Atlantic

COACH Charlie Partridge [3rd season]
6-18 [0-0 in bowl games]

The Owls had the conference's best pass rush. If QB Jason Driskel and the offense can catch up, they could improve on last season's three-win total. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON DE Trey Hendrickson**
Hendrickson's 13½ sacks in 2015 was not only tops in the conference but also tied for second most nationally. The senior had at least 2½ sacks in all three of FAU's wins.

🔴 **X-FACTOR QB Jason Driskel**
The sophomore replaced the injured Jaquez Johnson but completed just 51 percent of his passes and threw only 8.3 percent of his passes 15 or more yards downfield.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Cornerback**
Four true freshmen saw time in the secondary, including Herb Miller [eight passes defended]. He'll be pushed by junior Raekwon Williams and sophomore Shelton Lewis.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Florida Atlantic sacked, hit or put opposing QBs under duress on 13.4 percent of all drop-backs and tallied 35 sacks, both league highs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS RUSH?** "We had to set all of our protections to Hendrickson. He still had multiple sacks against us. He's the best player in the league on defense." —Conference USA head coach

🔴 Only 12.8 percent of carries by RB Greg Howell [6-1, 215 pounds] went for zero or negative yardage. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OWLS' RUNNING GAME?** "They've got big, powerful backs and do a great job. Being able to contain their run game and seeing where it goes from there is key." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [3-5]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Jaquez Johnson: 1,592 yards
RUSHING Greg Howell: **598 yards**
RECEIVING Jenson Stoshak: 820 yards
TACKLES Azeez Al-Shaair: **94**
SACKS Trey Hendrickson: **13½**
INTERCEPTIONS Cre'Von LeBlanc: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.2
🔴 **FPI CHANCE FLORIDA ATLANTIC WINS**

9/3 vs. Southern Illinois **72%** ● **9/10** @ Miami [Fla.] **4%** ● **9/17** @ Kansas State **9%** ● **9/24** vs. Ball State **61%** ● **10/1** @ Florida International **46%** ● **10/8** vs. Charlotte **78%** ● **10/15** @ Marshall **16%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Western Kentucky **29%** ● **11/5** @ Rice **43%** ● **11/12** vs. UTEP **75%** ● **11/19** vs. Old Dominion **62%** ● **11/26** @ Middle Tennessee **22%**

5 Old Dominion

The Monarchs return 17 starters, and if they improve the run D (203 ypg), they could go bowling in just their second season of eligibility and eighth overall. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE** **Quarterback**
Shuler Bentley started as a freshman only to be replaced by ex-WR David Washington, who then tore his ACL in November. Washington should be at full strength by August, so like the fast-paced offense, the position is wide open.

THE PRESSER

🔴 ODU uses the shotgun but is balanced (401 rushes, 433 passes); junior RB Ray Lawry gained 5.9 ypc. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWRY?** “When he gets started, he’s tough to contend with. You have to disrupt him.” —Conference USA head coach

COACH Bobby Wilder (8th season)
57–27 (0–0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5) | **BOWL GAME** None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6
● **FPI CHANCE ODU WINS**

9/3 vs. Hampton **95%** ● **9/10** @ Appalachian State **13%** ● **9/17** @ NC State **7%** ● **9/24** vs. UTSA **78%** ● **10/1** @ Charlotte **62%** ● **10/8** vs. Massachusetts **76%** ● **10/15** BYE ● **10/22** @ Western Kentucky **15%** ● **10/29** @ UTEP **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Marshall **27%** ● **11/12** vs. Southern Miss **40%** ● **11/19** @ Florida Atlantic **38%** ● **11/26** vs. Florida International **62%**

6 Florida International

Just five starters are back on D, but FIU’s offense returns its leading passer, rusher and receiver—and seven O-linemen with at least four starts last season. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON LB** **Anthony Wint**
The junior made 88 tackles last season. With the loss of Michael Wakefield and Denzell Perine up front, a defense that allowed almost 30 points and 184.7 rushing yards per game will undoubtedly lean on the 224-pound ‘backer.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Alex McGough completed 64 percent of his throws but averaged just 10.1 yards per completion. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING HIM?** “Take away easy throws. Get up on them, and don’t give slants, hitches, that type of thing.” —Conference USA head coach

COACH Ron Turner (4th season)
10–26 (0–0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5) | **BOWL GAME** None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
● **FPI CHANCE FIU WINS**

9/1 vs. Indiana **22%** ● **9/9** vs. Maryland **27%** ● **9/17** @ Massachusetts **57%** ● **9/24** vs. Central Florida **48%** ● **10/1** vs. Florida Atlantic **54%** ● **10/8** @ UTEP **49%** ● **10/15** @ Charlotte **59%** ● **10/22** vs. Louisiana Tech **42%** ● **10/29** vs. Middle Tennessee **34%** ● **11/5** @ Western Kentucky **12%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** vs. Marshall **30%** ● **11/26** @ Old Dominion **38%**

7 Charlotte

Charlotte’s first year in the FBS featured abysmal QB play (team QBR of 16.9) and the second-most turnovers in the nation (35). An influx of transfers can only help. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE** **Quarterback**
Lee McNeill tossed one TD and 10 INTs, then was pulled for Brooks Barden (four TDs, five picks). They’ll be pushed by transfers Hasaan Klugh (NC A&T), Cody Keith (ECU) and former four-star recruit Kevin Olsen (Miami).

THE PRESSER

🔴 RB Kalif Phillips (961 yards) had 29 runs of 10 or more yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PHILLIPS?** “One of the best—if not the best—running backs in the league. It was the second or even third guy who had to finally get him down.” —Conference USA head coach

COACH Brad Lambert (4th season)
12–22 (0–0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–10 (0–8) | **BOWL GAME** None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.6
● **FPI CHANCE CHARLOTTE WINS**

9/1 @ Louisville **1%** ● **9/10** vs. Elon **85%** ● **9/17** vs. Eastern Michigan **49%** ● **9/24** @ Temple **6%** ● **10/1** vs. Old Dominion **38%** ● **10/8** @ Florida Atlantic **22%** ● **10/15** vs. Florida International **41%** ● **10/22** @ Marshall **8%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Southern Miss **14%** ● **11/12** vs. Rice **42%** ● **11/19** vs. Middle Tennessee **19%** ● **11/26** @ UTSA **39%**

1 Southern Miss

COACH Jay Hopson [1st season]

Thirteen starters return, including a 4,000-yard passer and a 1,000-yard rusher. But there's a new coach (Jay Hopson), now that Todd Monken is off to the NFL. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Nick Mullens

Only five players threw for more than Mullen's 4,476 yards, and just three topped his 38 TDs.

● X-FACTOR RB Ito Smith

Smith rushed for 1,128 yards and 10 TDs despite splitting time with Jalen Richard [1,098 yards, 14 TDs]. With Richard gone, Smith will be counted on to carry the new rushing offense.

● POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

There's no replacing Michael Thomas [1,391 yards, 19.6 ypc], but someone has to try. Little-used sophomores Korey Robertson and Jordan Mitchell will challenge mended Marquise Ricard [417 yards in 2014] for a spot opposite D.J. Thompson [779 yards].

THE PRESSER

● Mullens completed 63.5 percent of his throws last year and threw for 331 yards and two TDs in the Heart of Dallas Bowl against Washington. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE QB?** "Mullens is the best player in the league coming back. Phenomenal player. They can run it, they can throw it. But Mullens is the key." —Conference USA head coach

● With a two-score lead, the Southern Miss pass D allowed just a 51.1 completion percentage. Safety D'Nerius Antoine was a star with 103 tackles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS DEFENSE?** "You can't fall behind schedule. They can get into nickel and dime, and they've got some really good defensive backs." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–5 [7–1]

BOWL GAME Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl vs. Washington, 44–31 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Nick Mullens: **4,476 yards**

RUSHING Ito Smith: **1,128 yards**

RECEIVING Michael Thomas: 1,391 yards

TACKLES D'Nerius Antoine: **103**

SACKS Dylan Bradley: **6½**

INTERCEPTIONS Kalan Reed: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.6

● **FPI CHANCE SOUTHERN MISS WINS**

9/3 @ Kentucky **20%** ● **9/10** vs. Savannah State **99%** ● **9/17** vs. Troy **66%** ● **9/24** @ UTEP **72%** ● **10/1** vs. Rice **77%** ● **10/8** @ UTSA **75%** ● **10/15** @ LSU **2%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Marshall **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Charlotte **86%** ● **11/12** @ Old Dominion **60%** ● **11/19** @ North Texas **81%** ● **11/25** vs. Louisiana Tech **58%**

2 Louisiana Tech

COACH Skip Holtz [4th season]
22–17 [2–0 in bowl games]

Only nine starters return, the fewest in the conference, and there's no big-name transfer QB. Winning nine games for a third straight year could be a tall order. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON WR Trent Taylor

The senior hauled in 99 passes for 1,282 yards last season, the league's fourth most. He caught 75.6 percent of all targets.

● X-FACTOR DE Jaylon Ferguson

The 6-foot-5 sophomore led the team with 15 tackles for loss. His six sacks tied for the team high, and he forced two fumbles.

● POSITION BATTLE Cornerback

The pass defense ranked 99th [256.5 ypg] in the FBS, as it broke in then-freshmen Aaron Roberson [1 INT last season], Trey Spencer and Ephraim Kitchen. Expect the trio to be pushed by transfers Ronald Lewis [Arizona State] and Jarrell Jackson [Hawaii].

THE PRESSER

● Louisiana Tech created 22 turnovers last year and has 64 since 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "Any time you play a team as talented as Louisiana Tech, you can't give them anything. That's what it comes down to: protecting the ball." —Conference USA head coach

● At just 119.3 rushing yards allowed per game, the Bulldogs had the league's best run defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY'RE SO GOOD?** "You have to be able to run the football against that stout run defense. They usually have some big playmakers up front. I know they lose [Vernon Butler] inside, but they always seem to replace those guys." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 [6–2]

BOWL GAME R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl vs. Arkansas State, 47–28 W

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Jeff Driskel: 4,033 yards

RUSHING Kenneth Dixon: 1,070 yards

RECEIVING Trent Taylor: **1,282 yards**

TACKLES Beau Fitte: 104

SACKS Vontarrius Dora: 6

INTERCEPTIONS Bryson Abraham: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.9

● **FPI CHANCE LOUISIANA TECH WINS**

9/3 @ Arkansas **7%** ● **9/10** vs. South Carolina State **94%** ● **9/17** @ Texas Tech **14%** ● **9/24** @ Middle Tennessee **34%** ● **10/1** vs. UTEP **83%** ● **10/6** vs. Western Kentucky **38%** ● **10/15** @ Massachusetts [Foxborough] **73%** ● **10/22** @ Florida International **58%** ● **10/29** vs. Rice **74%** ● **11/5** @ North Texas **79%** ● **11/12** vs. UTSA **86%** ● **11/19** BYE ● **11/25** @ Southern Miss **42%**

3 Rice

Blame the Owls' first losing season since 2011 on a porous defense that ranked 102nd nationally. Blame the 16 returning starters if it happens again. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Alex Lyons

Despite the lack of a formidable defense, the senior linebacker turned in 77 tackles, 5½ TFLs, 1½ sacks and 4 passes broken up.

X-FACTOR RB Darik Dillard

The 5-foot-10, 215-pound senior must put his new QB in manageable situations. Dillard averaged 5.2 ypc last year, and only 11.9 percent of his runs went for zero or negative yardage.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Senior Tyler Stehling has the early lead on the starting job but will have competition from Nate German, who also caught 18 passes as a wide receiver last year, and a pair of redshirt freshmen in J.T. Granato and Jackson Tyner.

THE PRESSER

Rice ran on 54.6 percent of all plays, and its 177.6 rushing yards per game ranked second in Conference USA. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RICE'S PHILOSOPHY?** "Any time you play Rice, you know they are going to control the ball. They're gonna run the ball." —Conference USA head coach

Six of Rice's front seven defenders return, and DE Graysen Schantz (ACL) is back after missing all but Week 1 of 2015. The run defense that gave up 190.3 ypg should improve. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING RICE'S DEFENSE?** "They really keep those linebackers clean. You've got to get the ball out on the edge and get away from those guys." —Conference USA head coach

COACH David Bailiff [10th season]
53-60 [3-1 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 [3-5]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Driphus Jackson: 2,348 yards
RUSHING Darik Dillard: 698 yards
RECEIVING Zach Wright: 554 yards
TACKLES Alex Lyons: 77
SACKS Brian Womac: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Zach Espinosa: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.3

● **FPI CHANCE RICE WINS**

9/1 @ Western Kentucky 12% ● 9/10 @ Army 26% ● 9/17 vs. Baylor 4% ● 9/24 vs. North Texas 78% ● 10/1 @ Southern Miss 23% ● 10/8 BYE ● 10/15 vs. UTSA 77% ● 10/22 vs. Prairie View A&M 94% ● 10/29 @ Louisiana Tech 26% ● 11/5 vs. Florida Atlantic 57% ● 11/12 @ Charlotte 58% ● 11/19 vs. UTEP 70% ● 11/26 @ Stanford 2%

4 UTEP

The Miners cobbled together five wins last year despite struggling on offense after losing star RB Aaron Jones to injury. Finding a QB could return them to .500. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Alvin Jones

The junior averaged 7.8 tackles per game, and his 6½ sacks and 14½ tackles for loss led all linebackers in the conference.

X-FACTOR RB Aaron Jones

Alvin's twin missed nearly all of last year with an ankle injury, then was charged with DWI in February. Aaron, who is expected to return, averaged 102 ypg over three seasons.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Junior Mack Leftwich threw for 1,228 yards and nine touchdowns. However, two other QBs got playing time: Ryan Metz completed 59 percent of his 140 passes, and Kavika Johnson picked up more than 200 rushing yards.

THE PRESSER

The Miners were sixth in the nation in time of possession, holding the ball for 33:38 per game. Their 29.1 seconds per play was tops in Conference USA and eighth in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR STYLE?** "They're going to run the ball, they're going to get in their two tight ends and they're going to try to beat the crap out of you." —Conference USA head coach

Aaron Jones was exceptional in his first two seasons, especially when he rushed for 1,321 yards in 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JONES?** "He's about as good as there is in the league. And with that guy, you have to have two, three and four guys around him to get him down." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 [3-5]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Mack Leftwich: 1,228 yards
RUSHING Jeremiah Laufasa: 381 yards
RECEIVING Jaquan White: 494 yards
TACKLES Alvin Jones: 93
SACKS Alvin Jones: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Dashone Smith: 1

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.2

● **FPI CHANCE UTEP WINS**

9/3 vs. New Mexico State 57% ● 9/10 @ Texas 2% ● 9/17 vs. Army 39% ● 9/24 vs. Southern Miss 29% ● 10/1 @ Louisiana Tech 17% ● 10/8 vs. Florida International 51% ● 10/15 BYE ● 10/22 @ UTSA 51% ● 10/29 vs. Old Dominion 50% ● 11/5 vs. Houston Baptist 98% ● 11/12 @ Florida Atlantic 25% ● 11/19 @ Rice 30% ● 11/26 vs. North Texas 69%

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BE THE FIRST TO GAIN ACCESS

5 UTSA

New coach Frank Wilson inherits just 10 returning starters, but one is 1,000-yard rusher Jarveon Williams. A transfer QB could jump-start the passing game. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Jarveon Williams**
Williams was the most prominent piece in the offense last year, gaining 1,042 rushing yards without a fumble. Only three C-USA backs averaged more than his 6.0 yards per carry.

🔴 **X-FACTOR DE Marcus Davenport**
The 6-foot-6, 225-pound junior had four sacks and 49 tackles and will be needed to offset the loss of DE Jason Neill (8½ sacks).

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Junior Dalton Sturm started seven games but managed just a 24.3 QBR. He'll compete with Jared Johnson, a grad transfer from Sam Houston State who threw for 5,352 yards, ran for 1,601 and scored 50 TDs in three seasons.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Wilson spent six seasons coaching LSU's backfield, which averaged 2.4 yards after contact per rush, third among Power 5 teams in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT?** "I'm sure we will see a little LSU power in their offense, something we don't see a lot of in this conference. They've got a great running back." —Conference USA head coach

🔴 The UTSA pass defense allowed 8.1 yards per attempt last season, so it's no surprise opponents averaged 34.2 attempts per game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK THEM?** "We really focused on getting the corners into one-on-ones last year. A lot of good play-action and you get them into man coverage." —Conference USA head coach

COACH Frank Wilson (1st season)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (3-5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Dalton Sturm: **1,354 yards**
RUSHING Jarveon Williams: **1,042 yards**
RECEIVING David Morgan II: 566 yards
TACKLES Duke Wheeler: 93
SACKS Jason Neill: 8½
INTERCEPTIONS Bennett Okotcha: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.8

🔴 **FPI CHANCE UTSA WINS**

9/3 vs. Alabama State **94%** ● **9/10** @ Colorado State **15%** ● **9/17** vs. Arizona State **8%** ● **9/24** @ Old Dominion **22%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/8** vs. Southern Miss **25%** ● **10/15** @ Rice **23%** ● **10/22** vs. UTEP **49%** ● **10/29** vs. North Texas **62%** ● **11/5** @ Middle Tennessee **10%** ● **11/12** @ Louisiana Tech **14%** ● **11/19** @ Texas A&M **1%** ● **11/26** vs. Charlotte **61%**

6 North Texas

The Mean Green went 1-11 and were outscored by 26 ppg. The good news: Fifteen starters return, and new coach Seth Littrell brings an exciting offense. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON DE Jarrian Roberts**
Roberts was one of the few bright spots for a defense that gave up more than 500 ypg. The senior recorded 6½ sacks and 10 TFLs.

🔴 **X-FACTOR QB Alec Morris**
The Alabama—yes, that Alabama—transfer is the front-runner for the starting job, ahead of Connor Means and Caleb Chumley. However, Morris has just a single 6-yard pass under his belt in three seasons.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver**
Turner Smiley and Tee Goree lead the way (a combined 40 catches for 373 yards in '15), but freshman Deion Hair'Griffin and senior Thaddeous Thompson will get reps.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Littrell ran the offense for a North Carolina team that had the 15th-most throws of 10 or more yards downfield (348) in the Power 5 the past two seasons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT?** "We know [he] worked for Larry Fedora, so we assume that's what they will be doing: throwing the ball down the field." —Conference USA head coach

🔴 The Mean Green allowed 239.9 yards on the ground per game, ninth most in the FBS. Opponents picked up 5.4 ypc and 38 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLAYING THEM?** "Well, we aren't going to try to fit square pegs in round holes. If they are going to give us the run, then we are going to hopefully be able to run." —Conference USA head coach

COACH Seth Littrell (1st season)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 1-11 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING DaMarcus Smith: 1,010 yards
RUSHING Jeffrey Wilson: **830 yards**
RECEIVING Carlos Harris: 727 yards
TACKLES Kishawn McClain: **110**
SACKS Jarrian Roberts: **6½**
INTERCEPTIONS Zac Whitfield: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.8

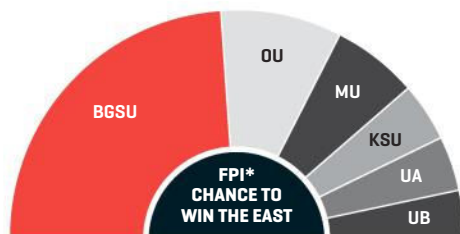
🔴 **FPI CHANCE NORTH TEXAS WINS**

9/3 vs. SMU **20%** ● **9/10** vs. Bethune-Cookman **80%** ● **9/17** @ Florida **1%** ● **9/24** @ Rice **22%** ● **10/1** vs. Middle Tennessee **17%** ● **10/8** vs. Marshall **13%** ● **10/15** BYE ● **10/22** @ Army **15%** ● **10/29** @ UTSA **38%** ● **11/5** vs. Louisiana Tech **22%** ● **11/12** @ Western Kentucky **5%** ● **11/19** vs. Southern Miss **20%** ● **11/26** @ UTEP **31%**

MAC

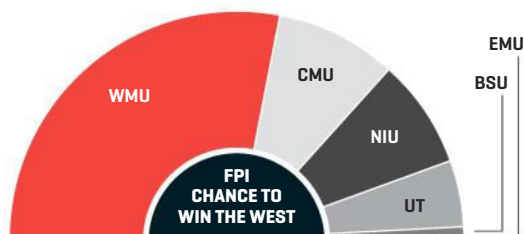
MAC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
BOWLING GREEN	90	47.9%
OHIO	102	17.4%
MIAMI (OHIO)	112	12.0%
KENT STATE	105	8.5%
AKRON	113	7.7%
BUFFALO	115	6.5%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WESTERN MICHIGAN	53	56.4%
CENTRAL MICHIGAN	80	17.4%
NORTHERN ILLINOIS	79	15.6%
TOLEDO	87	9.4%
BALL STATE	110	1.1%
EASTERN MICHIGAN	119	0.1%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
97.1

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
46%
WESTERN
MICHIGAN

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

WR **Corey Davis** Sr. Western Michigan

ALL-MAC

QB	Cooper Rush	Sr.	Central Michigan
RB	Joel Bouagnon	Sr.	Northern Illinois
RB	Jamauri Bogan	So.	Western Michigan
WR	Corey Davis	Sr.	Western Michigan
WR	Kenny Golladay	Sr.	Northern Illinois
WR	Ronnie Moore	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	Tim McAuliffe	Jr.	Bowling Green
OL	Ryan Hunter	Jr.	Bowling Green
OL	Chukwuma Okorafor	Jr.	Western Michigan
OL	Storm Norton	Sr.	Toledo
OL	Levon Myers	Sr.	Northern Illinois

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CB **Shawun Lurry** Jr. Northern Illinois

ALL-MAC

DE	Joshua Posley	Sr.	Ball State
DE	Jamal Marcus	Sr.	Akron
DT	Pat O'Connor	Sr.	Eastern Michigan
DT	Terence Waugh	Sr.	Kent State
LB	Quentin Poling	Jr.	Ohio
LB	Austin Valdez	Jr.	Bowling Green
LB	Sean Wiggins	Sr.	Ball State
CB	Shawun Lurry	Jr.	Northern Illinois
CB	Demetrius Monday	Sr.	Kent State
S	Nate Holley	Sr.	Kent State
S	DeJuan Rogers	Sr.	Toledo

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	Christian Hagan	Jr.	Northern Illinois
P	Joseph Davidson	Jr.	Bowling Green
RS	Aregeros Turner	Sr.	Northern Illinois

Corey Davis

Davis needs just 403 yards to pass Jordan White (4,187, 2007-11) as WMU's career receiving leader.



1 Bowling Green

COACH Mike Jinks [1st season]

The Falcons' reward for two MAC titles in three years? Losing their coach to the ACC. Again. Still, Mike Jinks' air raid should help them stay topflight. —Anthony Olivieri

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Austin Valdez

The junior tied for the second-most tackles in the FBS [144], including a team-high 11 TFLs.

● X-FACTOR WR Ronnie Moore

Moore is a prototypical slot receiver who thrives under the Falcons' mandate to get the ball out quickly [think Julian Edelman]. BGSU loses a pair of 1,000-yard WRs from last year, so the dependable Moore [18 career receiving TDs] must help ease in a new starting QB.

● POSITION BATTLE Running back

BGSU will miss Travis Greene's 43 career TDs but has options: Fred Coppet, who gained 825 yards in '15, and Matt Domer, who showed big-strike ability with a 95-yard TD run at Ball State.

THE PRESSER

● QB James Knapke started 13 games in '14, filling in admirably for an injured Matt Johnson [3,173 yards, 15 TDs]. Two years later, he's the leader for the starting gig. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT KNAPKE'S TRANSITION IS FOR 2016?** "Historically, the MAC has been dominated by teams with great QBs, going back to Ben Roethlisberger. That's a key factor." —MAC head coach

● BGSU's defense, which returns six starters, bent [417.8 ypg allowed in '15] but didn't break [57.4 red zone percentage]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF THE D?** "It's probably better than those stats. They're so far ahead that people get their yards when they're losing by 30." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–4 [7–1]

BOWL GAME GoDaddy Bowl vs. Georgia Southern, 58–27 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Matt Johnson: 4,946 yards

RUSHING Travis Greene: 1,299 yards

RECEIVING Roger Lewis: 1,544 yards

TACKLES Austin Valdez: 144

SACKS Taylor Royster: 6

INTERCEPTIONS Alfonso Mack: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0

● **FPI CHANCE BOWLING GREEN WINS**

9/3 @ Ohio State **5%** ● **9/10** vs. North Dakota **94%** ● **9/17** vs. Middle Tennessee **54%** ● **9/24** @ Memphis **36%** ● **10/1** vs. Eastern Michigan **82%** ● **10/8** @ Ohio **56%** ● **10/15** @ Toledo **39%** ● **10/22** vs. Miami [Ohio] **75%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/1** @ Northern Illinois **32%** ● **11/9** @ Akron **63%** ● **11/15** vs. Kent State **71%** ● **11/25** vs. Buffalo **78%**

2 Ohio

COACH Frank Solich [12th season]
80–61 [2–5 in bowl games]

Frank Solich's hallmark is unspectacular consistency: 7.3 wins per season since '05. That's in reach again in 2016, with experience at QB and a solid defense. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON LB Quentin Poling

Poling is the hybrid, good-in-coverage LB who excels in the pass-happy MAC. And even though he sat out two games last season [knee], he amassed 10½ TFLs and 4 INTs, two of which he returned to the house.

● X-FACTOR QB J.D. Sprague

The senior is a mixed bag. He recorded a 29.3 QBR splitting time [five starts] with Derrius Vick in 2014. But when he was relegated to backup duty last season, he threw for seven TDs.

● POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

Who will join mainstay OT Troy Watson [27 career starts]? It's a crowded group; at least six Bobcats are vying for time at tackle and guard.

THE PRESSER

● Five players logged at least one rushing TD last year, including three returning Bobcats. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW OHIO'S OFFENSE GETS EVERYONE INVOLVED?** "They don't overpower you in one particular area, but they spread you out. Their QB runs, their running back runs ... they run a little option, they mix it up." —MAC head coach

● Ohio has never picked off fewer than 12 passes under Solich, and it was one of 16 FBS teams that returned three interceptions for TDs in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S BALL-HAWK NATURE?** "You better not lose the turnover battle [against the Bobcats]. They make one less mistake than your team makes." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 [5–3]

BOWL GAME Raycom Media Camellia Bowl vs. Appalachian State, 31–29 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Derrius Vick: 1,809 yards

RUSHING A.J. Ouellette: 687 yards

RECEIVING Sebastian Smith: 770 yards

TACKLES Quentin Poling: 69

SACKS Tarell Basham: 5½

INTERCEPTIONS Quentin Poling: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1

● **FPI CHANCE OHIO WINS**

9/3 vs. Texas State **82%** ● **9/10** @ Kansas **43%** ● **9/17** @ Tennessee **1%** ● **9/24** vs. Gardner-Webb **96%** ● **10/1** @ Miami [Ohio] **48%** ● **10/8** vs. Bowling Green **44%** ● **10/15** vs. Eastern Michigan **73%** ● **10/22** @ Kent State **44%** ● **10/27** @ Toledo **27%** ● **11/3** vs. Buffalo **66%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/15** @ Central Michigan **23%** ● **11/22** vs. Akron **61%**

3 Miami (Ohio)

The RedHawks have won just five games since 2013, and the slow crawl to relevance hinges on nine returning starters jump-starting an anemic attack. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE JT Jones

The RedHawks collected 30 sacks last season, a solid showing that was tied for 42nd in the FBS. Jones led the charge (10 sacks, including a school-record four against Eastern Michigan).

X-FACTOR QB Billy Bahl

Bahl gained valuable reps as a true freshman in 2015 (seven starts), but Miami will need a better showing in Year 2. He threw more INTs (13) than TDs (eight) en route to a 21.6 QBR.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Miami didn't have a 500-yard rusher in 2015 (3.6 ypc as a team), but it did claim three freshman RBs with 50-plus carries. One of them must emerge as the primary option.

THE PRESSER

Last season the RedHawks converted just 31.2 percent of their third downs (No. 118 in the FBS), when dual-threat QBs are most effective. Bahl finished with minus-70 yards rushing on the season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PLAN FOR BAHL?** "He wasn't the most mobile but had a great arm. You have to get hits on him." —MAC head coach

Three D-linemen recorded at least 4½ sacks last season, and two return for a defense that totaled 83 TFLs, third most in the MAC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LINE'S STRENGTH?** "With a guy like Jones, you've got to double-team a lot. You've got to put two hats on him and let the linebackers roam until you can get him under control." —MAC head coach

COACH Chuck Martin (3rd season)
5-19 (0-0 in bowl games)

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Billy Bahl: 1,416 yards
RUSHING Alonzo Smith: 498 yards
RECEIVING Rokeem Williams: 543 yards
TACKLES Kent Kern: 82
SACKS JT Jones: 10
INTERCEPTIONS Brison Burris: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.8

● **FPI CHANCE MIAMI (OHIO) WINS**

9/3 @ Iowa 6% ● 9/10 vs. Eastern Illinois 74% ● 9/17 vs. Western Kentucky 23% ● 9/24 @ Cincinnati 14% ● 10/1 vs. Ohio 52% ● 10/8 @ Akron 43% ● 10/15 vs. Kent State 54% ● 10/22 @ Bowling Green 25% ● 10/29 @ Eastern Michigan 52% ● 11/4 vs. Central Michigan 31% ● 11/12 @ Buffalo 42% ● 11/19 BYE ● 11/22 vs. Ball State 59%

4 Kent State

The Golden Flashes were, well, flashless in 2015: no 1,000-yard passer, receiver or rusher. No surprise, they'll need a stout D to pad the win column in 2016. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON S Nate Holley

Behind Holley (15-plus tackles in five of his final seven games), the Flashes allowed 4.9 ypp in '15, second best in the MAC.

X-FACTOR WR Antwan Dixon

The sophomore offers Kent State a rare opportunity for explosiveness—Dixon's first career catch was a 20-yard TD, and he ran for 47- and 75-yard scores in back-to-back games.

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Dixon and Raekwon James will see carries. But the Flashes are hoping Justin Rankin, an early enrollee and three-time All-Ohio prep, will emerge for a ground game that managed just six TDs last year, worst in the MAC.

THE PRESSER

The Flashes' 30 plays of 20-plus yards last year? Second worst in the FBS. Their 4.1 ypp? Dead last. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT KENT STATE'S LACK OF BIG PLAYS?** "You prepare for a lower-scoring game. When you have a team that struggles for consistency, you have to make them earn it and make sure they don't get big chunks." —MAC head coach

Kent State returns the league's third-leading pass rusher (nine sacks) in Terence Waugh. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D?** "You gotta protect your QB first. Waugh is a very good pass rusher, but you gotta give your QB a chance. And they use their safeties in doubling, so you have to find a one-on-one matchup to exploit." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Colin Reardon: 901 yards
RUSHING Trayon Durham: 428 yards
RECEIVING Antwan Dixon: 355 yards
TACKLES Nate Holley: 141
SACKS Terence Waugh: 9
INTERCEPTIONS Demetrius Monday: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.1

● **FPI CHANCE KENT STATE WINS**

9/3 @ Penn State 6% ● 9/10 vs. North Carolina A&T 87% ● 9/17 vs. Monmouth 92% ● 9/24 @ Alabama 1% ● 10/1 vs. Akron 63% ● 10/8 @ Buffalo 48% ● 10/15 @ Miami (Ohio) 46% ● 10/22 vs. Ohio 56% ● 10/29 @ Central Michigan 21% ● 11/5 BYE ● 11/8 vs. Western Michigan 22% ● 11/15 @ Bowling Green 29% ● 11/25 vs. Northern Illinois 34%

5 Akron

COACH Terry Bowden [5th season]
19–30 [1–0 in bowl games]

The Zips are coming off their first eight-win season since moving up to the FBS in 1987, but with a D in rebuilding mode, a return to mid-MAC form is likely. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON QB Thomas Woodson**
His 2015 stats were mostly pedestrian—53.6 QBR, 7.2 ypa—but in his last three games, Woodson threw five TDs with one interception.

🔴 **X-FACTOR WR JoJo Natson**
The Utah State transfer specializes as a don't-kick-it-to-him return man [11.7 yards per punt return in 2014, No. 9 in the FBS]. Says coach Terry Bowden: "He can be a single guy who can win ballgames."

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Linebacker**
The Zips lose last year's starting trio, Jatavis Brown [20 TFLs] included. Ulysees Gilbert, Brian Bell, Andrew Hauser and John Rachal—with 36 total tackles in '15—will vie for fill-in duty.

THE PRESSER

🔴 Akron's run-first offense loses two senior backs, but it'll use Woodson's legs in 2016 [591 rush yards, tops among MAC passers]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORKS VS. THE RUN-HEAVY ATTACK?** "You better use a little creativity to bring pressure ... so they don't know where that extra hat is coming from." —MAC defensive coach

🔴 Only four starters return to a defense that allowed 4.9 ypp, No. 1 in the MAC. But DL Jamal Marcus and Se'Von Pittman (8½ sacks combined) will need to be accounted for. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FRONT LINE?** "Best in the league last year. They dominate in the run and at pressuring the QB. We try to throw it early so they soften up." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 [5–3]
BOWL GAME Famous Idaho Potato Bowl vs. Utah State, 23–21 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Thomas Woodson: **2,202 yards**
RUSHING Conor Hundley: 911 yards
RECEIVING Jerome Lane: **782 yards**
TACKLES Jatavis Brown: 116
SACKS Jatavis Brown: 12
INTERCEPTIONS DeAndre Scott: **6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
● **FPI CHANCE AKRON WINS**

9/3 vs. Virginia Military Institute **95%** ● **9/10** @ Wisconsin **4%** ● **9/17** @ Marshall **15%** ● **9/24** vs. Appalachian State **22%** ● **10/1** @ Kent State **37%** ● **10/8** vs. Miami [Ohio] **57%** ● **10/15** vs. Western Michigan **17%** ● **10/22** @ Ball State **40%** ● **10/27** @ Buffalo **43%** ● **11/2** vs. Toledo **34%** ● **11/9** vs. Bowling Green **37%** ● **11/19** BYE ● **11/22** @ Ohio **39%**

6 Buffalo

COACH Lance Leipold [2nd season]
5–7 [0–0 in bowl games]

The Bulls lose the face of their program—QB Joe Licata started 40 straight games from 2012 to 2015—and seven more starters on offense. That's a lot to overcome. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Jordan Johnson**
Johnson split time with departing Anthonie Taylor last year but was the Bulls' go-to back in the red zone. He cashed in 10 TDs inside the 20-yard line, tied for third most in the MAC.

🔴 **X-FACTOR LB Jarrett Franklin**
With the Bulls down their top tackler and sacker, the time is right for Franklin's return. He started 10 games and registered 5 TFLs in 2014 before sitting out last season [back].

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Graduate transfer Grant Rohach [five career starts at Iowa State] has experience; sophomore Chris Merchant knows the system; red-shirt frosh Tyree Jackson has size [6-5, 230].

THE PRESSER

🔴 Licata's 76 career TD passes gives way to ... 10, all courtesy of Rohach. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO CONFUSE A NEW QB?** "You've got to mix up looks—pressure, not pressure. That was a key for us last year, and we'd do that against a less experienced quarterback as well." —MAC head coach

🔴 Buffalo returns three DBs to a defense that picked off opposing QBs 13 times in 2015 [T4 in the MAC]. The key: Soften up the Bulls on the ground first. Their seven losses came in games in which they allowed 150-plus yards rushing. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S VULNERABILITY?** "You gotta run the ball better. We didn't do too much dictating offensively [last year]. Run. The. Ball. Better." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 [3–5]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Joe Licata: 2,969 yards
RUSHING Anthonie Taylor: 829 yards
RECEIVING Ron Willoughby: 813 yards
TACKLES Nick Gilbo: 113
SACKS Okezie Alozie: 5
INTERCEPTIONS Okezie Alozie: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
● **FPI CHANCE BUFFALO WINS**

9/2 vs. Albany **92%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** @ Nevada **23%** ● **9/24** vs. Army **45%** ● **10/1** @ Boston College **8%** ● **10/8** vs. Kent State **52%** ● **10/15** vs. Ball State **56%** ● **10/22** @ Northern Illinois **17%** ● **10/27** vs. Akron **57%** ● **11/3** @ Ohio **35%** ● **11/12** vs. Miami [Ohio] **58%** ● **11/19** @ Western Michigan **9%** ● **11/25** @ Bowling Green **22%**

1 Western Michigan

P.J. Fleck's prolific spread has the Broncos absolutely humming. With a 3,500-yard QB, a 1,400-yard WR and a 1,000-yard RB returning, no slowdown is in sight. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON WR Corey Davis

He exceeded 100 receiving yards in nine games last year, the most in the country. And Davis' 27 receiving TDs since 2014? Third best.

● X-FACTOR WR LeVante Bellamy

The backfield is replete with stars—Jamauri Bogan and Jarvion Franklin, the MAC's past two freshmen of the year—but Fleck will use Bellamy in speed sweep packages, forcing defenses to track his trio of weapons pre-snap.

● POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

Two of WMU's top three tacklers at LB return, though the D gave up 5.3 yards per rush in '15 [No. 113 in the FBS], so Edward Rolle, Kasey Carson and Lucas Cherocci will vie for reps.

THE PRESSER

● Leading the way on offense last year was QB Zach Terrell, who completed 67 percent of his passes, No. 11 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CONTAIN THE OFFENSE?** "You've got to be very, very smart and almost have to pick your poison from play to play based on down and distance." —MAC head coach

● The defense gave up chunks of yards in 2015 [6.3 ypp, No. 110 in the FBS] but limited opponents to a more respectable 26 red zone TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU VIEW WMU'S D?** "Yards per play is a valuable stat but a little overrated compared to points on the scoreboard. That's a risky defense. High risk, high reward." —MAC head coach

COACH P.J. Fleck (4th season)
17–21 [1–1 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 [6–2]
BOWL GAME Popeyes Bahamas Bowl vs. Middle Tennessee, 45–31 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Zach Terrell: **3,510 yards**
RUSHING Jamauri Bogan: **1,051 yards**
RECEIVING Corey Davis: **1,436 yards**
TACKLES Asantay Brown: **103**
SACKS Keion Adams: **4½**
INTERCEPTIONS Darius Phillips: **5**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.5

● **FPI CHANCE WESTERN MICHIGAN WINS**

9/3 @ Northwestern **42%** ● **9/10** vs. NC Central **99%** ● **9/17** @ Illinois **54%** ● **9/24** vs. Georgia Southern **75%** ● **10/1** @ Central Michigan **60%** ● **10/8** vs. Northern Illinois **73%** ● **10/15** @ Akron **83%** ● **10/22** vs. Eastern Michigan **93%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/1** @ Ball State **82%** ● **11/8** @ Kent State **78%** ● **11/19** vs. Buffalo **91%** ● **11/25** vs. Toledo **76%**

2 Central Michigan

A dynamic passing offense, led by record-setting QB Cooper Rush, will complement a stingy passing defense, which returns eight starters. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Cooper Rush

Who else? In a conference packed with talent, Rush stands out [69.4 QBR, No. 2 in the MAC]. Despite attempting the 10th-most passes in the FBS last year [489], he threw just 11 picks.

● X-FACTOR RB Romello Ross

Even in the Chippewas' decidedly pass-first attack, John Bonamego said he is looking to solidify a backfield with no clear workhorse. Ross could be his guy: He tied for a team-high four rush TDs last year despite limited duty.

● POSITION BATTLE Left tackle

Other question marks [tight end, safety] take a back seat to whoever will protect Rush's blind side—be it Joe Austin or Jack Ford.

THE PRESSER

● Rush racked up 53 passes of 20-plus yards last year [No. 19 in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO SLOW CMU DOWN?** "You've got to put them in longer passing situations. If they are sitting there with second-and-4 or less, they are in great play-action situations. You can't allow big plays." —MAC head coach

● Star DB Tony Annese [five pass breakups, two picks in 2015] returns to lead a pass D that gave up 6.5 ypa, second fewest in the MAC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO COUNTERACT THAT?** "You've got to try to have some type of run game, and the play-action has to be a part of [the plan]. The screen game too." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 [6–2]
BOWL GAME Quick Lane Bowl vs. Minnesota, 21–14 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cooper Rush: **3,848 yards**
RUSHING Martez Walker: 373 yards
RECEIVING Jesse Kroll: **866 yards**
TACKLES Kavon Frazier: 108
SACKS Blake Serpa: 3
INTERCEPTIONS Tony Annese: **2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4

● **FPI CHANCE CENTRAL MICHIGAN WINS**

9/1 vs. Presbyterian **98%** ● **9/10** @ Oklahoma State **6%** ● **9/17** vs. UNLV **83%** ● **9/24** @ Virginia **31%** ● **10/1** vs. Western Michigan **40%** ● **10/8** vs. Ball State **81%** ● **10/15** @ Northern Illinois **41%** ● **10/22** @ Toledo **48%** ● **10/29** vs. Kent State **79%** ● **11/4** @ Miami [Ohio] **70%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/15** vs. Ohio **78%** ● **11/22** @ Eastern Michigan **78%**

3 Northern Illinois

COACH Rod Carey (4th season)
31-12 (0-4 in bowl games)

The Huskies have earned six straight MAC title-game berths. And with 12 starters back, including QB Drew Hare, they'll have a very real shot at a seventh. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Joel Bouagnon

The senior is a true workhorse: 283 rush attempts in 2015 (T8 in the FBS), with 18 TDs on the ground (T10).

X-FACTOR QB Drew Hare

Hare led the Huskies to a 2014 MAC title, threw 14 TDs to 4 INTs in 2015 ... then ruptured his Achilles in Week 10. From there, NIU went 2-3 to close out the year. "If he stays healthy, the outcome is different," coach Rod Carey says.

POSITION BATTLE Safety

Losing Marlon Moore to graduation is big. His likely subs, Mychal Allen and Elijah Campbell, must help CB Shawun Lurry shore up a suspect pass D (243.6 ypg allowed, No. 10 in the MAC).

THE PRESSER

NIU reached the end zone on 70.8 percent of red zone drives last year (No. 12 in the FBS), largely because Bouagnon opened up the pass game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP THE HUSKIES?** "You have to look for ways to slow down what they do best. Sometimes it could mean more support from the secondary in stopping the run. It could be movement, in terms of slanting people. It could mean blitzing." —MAC head coach

Lurry, who led the country with 9 INTs in 2015, is a true lockdown corner. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PLAN FOR LURRY?** "Pick and choose the spots you go at him. Obviously, give him different looks so he doesn't settle in and get super aggressive." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-6 (6-2)

BOWL GAME San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl vs. Boise State, 55-7 L

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Drew Hare: **1,962 yards**

RUSHING Joel Bouagnon: **1,285 yards**

RECEIVING Kenny Golladay: **1,129 yards**

TACKLES Boomer Mays: 114

SACKS Perez Ford: 5

INTERCEPTIONS Shawun Lurry: 9

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4

● **FPI CHANCE NORTHERN ILLINOIS WINS**

9/3 @ Wyoming **63%** ● **9/10** @ South Florida **20%** ● **9/17** vs. San Diego State **51%** ● **9/24** vs. Western Illinois **91%** ● **10/1** @ Ball State **70%** ● **10/8** @ Western Michigan **27%** ● **10/15** vs. Central Michigan **59%** ● **10/22** vs. Buffalo **84%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/1** vs. Bowling Green **68%** ● **11/9** vs. Toledo (Chicago) **57%** ● **11/16** @ Eastern Michigan **78%** ● **11/25** @ Kent State **66%**

4 Toledo

COACH Jason Candle (2nd season)
1-0 (1-0 in bowl games)

The Rockets lost Matt Campbell (35-15) to Iowa State, so OC Jason Candle leads UT's bid for back-to-back 10-win seasons. It won't come easy with a depleted D. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Kareem Hunt

Despite a drop in numbers (973 yards and 12 TDs in a 2015 time-share with Terry Swanson, compared with 1,631 yards and 16 scores in '14), Hunt is the main attraction. He rushed for 10-plus yards 27 times, No. 7 in the MAC.

X-FACTOR OT Storm Norton

Norton stars on a line that gave up five sacks last year, second fewest in the FBS. That stoutness will help ease in a new Rockets QB.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Logan Woodside started 10 games in '14, when he threw 19 TDs but with a 48.3 QBR. Michael Julian (26 career attempts) and redshirt freshman Mitchell Guadagni are in play too.

THE PRESSER

A solid receiving corps returns almost entirely intact: Four Toledo pass catchers who logged 17 TDs combined last year are back. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PICK YOUR POISON VS. TOLEDO?** "You can't put eight or nine in the box against Kareem Hunt. If you leave guys on the island, they can beat you over the top." —MAC head coach

The Rockets gave up the MAC's fewest TDs in the air last year (15) but lose three of four D-line starters and five senior contributors in the secondary. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WORRIES ON THE D?** "UT does as good a job as anyone in our league at adjusting week to week. And it's always done an excellent job against us at throwing in wrinkles." —MAC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-2 (6-2)

BOWL GAME Marmot Boca Raton Bowl vs. Temple, 32-17 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Phillip Ely: 2,965 yards

RUSHING Kareem Hunt: **973 yards**

RECEIVING Cody Thompson: **825 yards**

TACKLES Chase Murdock: 88

SACKS Orion Jones: 6

INTERCEPTIONS Cheatham Norrils: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1

● **FPI CHANCE TOLEDO WINS**

9/3 @ Arkansas State **43%** ● **9/10** vs. Maine **95%** ● **9/17** vs. Fresno State **78%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **9/30** @ BYU **17%** ● **10/8** @ Eastern Michigan **74%** ● **10/15** vs. Bowling Green **61%** ● **10/22** vs. Central Michigan **53%** ● **10/27** vs. Ohio **74%** ● **11/2** @ Akron **66%** ● **11/9** vs. Northern Illinois (Chicago) **43%** ● **11/16** vs. Ball State **77%** ● **11/25** @ Western Michigan **24%**

5 Ball State

Having limped to eight wins combined since 2014, the Cardinals turn to Mike Neu, a former Ball State star QB, to resuscitate a stagnant offense. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Sean Wiggins

On a downtrodden defense, one of three in the FBS to allow 2,700 rush yards and 3,500 pass yards, Wiggins emerged as a bright spot—10 tackles in three of his last four games.

X-FACTOR QB Riley Neal

After taking over in Week 3 as a true freshman, Neal showed both promise (five games completing 60-plus percent) and pitfalls (a 3-INT outing vs. Bowling Green).

POSITION BATTLE Running back

Darian Green (5.0 ypc) and James Gilbert (4.0 ypc) split carries down the middle, but for the Cardinals to improve their 90th-ranked rush attack, one must emerge as a go-to in '16.

THE PRESSER

Neal threw 16 TDs to 6 INTs last year, the fourth-best rate in the MAC—a league replete with solid QB play. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEAL'S PROSPECTS FOR '16?** "They probably didn't throw a whole bunch of stuff on Neal's plate at the beginning, but he got better and better. When you've got a triggerman who can spread the ball to different players, you've got to play honest D." —MAC head coach

If there's cause for optimism on Ball State's porous defense (518.0 ypg), it's that nine returning starters can build on experience. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CARDS' DEFENSE?** "They're gap-sound. They're a snap-to-whistle D, and a team that plays like that always gives itself a chance." —MAC head coach

COACH Mike Neu [1st season]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 [2–6]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Riley Neal: **2,276 yards**

RUSHING Darian Green: **730 yards**

RECEIVING Jordan Williams: 920 yards

TACKLES Ben Ingle: 102

SACKS Anthony Winbush: **5**

INTERCEPTIONS Tyree Holder: **2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7

● **FPI CHANCE BALL STATE WINS**

9/2 @ Georgia State **37%** ● 9/10 @ Indiana **13%**
● 9/17 vs. Eastern Kentucky **79%** ● 9/24 @ Florida Atlantic **39%** ● 10/1 vs. Northern Illinois **31%** ● 10/8 @ Central Michigan **19%** ● 10/15 @ Buffalo **44%** ● 10/22 vs. Akron **60%** ● 10/29 BYE ● 11/1 vs. Western Michigan **18%** ● 11/8 vs. Eastern Michigan **67%** ● 11/16 @ Toledo **23%** ● 11/22 @ Miami [Ohio] **41%**

6 Eastern Michigan

Three wins in two years is ... not ideal, but EMU ranked sixth in the MAC in ypp, seventh in rush ypg and eighth in pass ypg. Hey, it's cause for modest optimism. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DL Pat O'Connor

Before sitting out all of last season with injury, O'Connor, one of the MAC's best down linemen, had 7½ sacks in 2014. All other Eagles defenders combined for 4½ that year.

X-FACTOR Ian Eriksen and Breck Turner

Half of EMU's one-two backfield punch departs, so Chris Creighton will try to pair either Eriksen or Turner, both with zero career carries, with last year's second-leading rusher, Shaq Vann.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver

A crop of redshirt freshmen—Isaac Holder, Braylin Collins, Dieuly Aristilde and Kezio Snelling—will join sophomore Eddie Daugherty in a group that has no real standout.

THE PRESSER

Daugherty was EMU's lone 500-yard receiver in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STIFLE YOUNG TALENT?** "Play aggressively at the line of scrimmage and be physical—you have to slow down that athleticism. Even after the catch, be physical. A lot of younger players don't pay as much attention to detail, like route running." —MAC head coach

The Eagles finished dead last in the FBS in rush ypg allowed (316.5) but get back DL stars in O'Connor and Jeremiah Harris, who played a combined three games last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT EMU'S FRONT?** "You don't attack that point on the line of scrimmage, or you don't throw against it. You throw everywhere else." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 1–11 [0–8]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Brogan Roback: **2,304 yards**

RUSHING Darius Jackson: 1,078 yards

RECEIVING Eddie Daugherty: **557 yards**

TACKLES Great Ibe: 131

SACKS Clay Dawson: 5

INTERCEPTIONS Kyle Rachwal: **1**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.0

● **FPI CHANCE EASTERN MICHIGAN WINS**

9/3 vs. Mississippi Valley State **99%** ● 9/10 @ Missouri **6%** ● 9/17 @ Charlotte **51%** ● 9/23 vs. Wyoming **44%** ● 10/1 @ Bowling Green **18%** ● 10/8 vs. Toledo **26%** ● 10/15 @ Ohio **27%** ● 10/22 @ Western Michigan **7%** ● 10/29 vs. Miami [Ohio] **48%** ● 11/5 BYE ● 11/8 @ Ball State **33%** ● 11/16 vs. Northern Illinois **22%** ● 11/22 vs. Central Michigan **22%**

18 YEARS AND COUNTING



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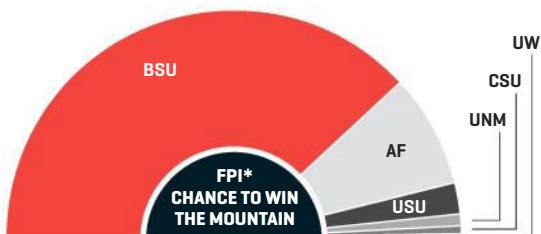
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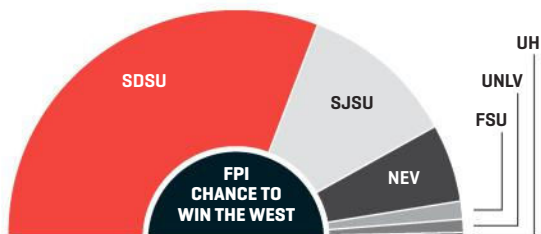
Mountain West outlook

MOUNTAIN	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
BOISE STATE	36	76.4%
AIR FORCE	68	16.0%
UTAH STATE	83	4.8%
NEW MEXICO	95	1.4%
COLORADO STATE	97	0.9%
WYOMING	101	0.5%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SAN DIEGO STATE	60	61.9%
SAN JOSE STATE	77	22.3%
NEVADA	92	11.1%
FRESNO STATE	104	2.5%
UNLV	108	1.8%
HAWAII	117	0.5%



AVERAGE
FPI RANK
86.5

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
63%
BOISE STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB **Donnel Pumphrey** Sr. San Diego State

ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST

QB **Brett Rypien** So. Boise State
 RB **Donnel Pumphrey** Sr. San Diego State
 RB **Jeremy McNichols** Jr. Boise State
 WR **Thomas Sperbeck** Sr. Boise State
 WR **Devonte Boyd** Jr. UNLV
 TE **Billy Freeman** Sr. San Jose State
 OL **Dejon Allen** Jr. Hawaii
 OL **Nico Siragusa** Sr. San Diego State
 OL **Fred Zerblis** Sr. Colorado State
 OL **Chase Roullier** Sr. Wyoming
 OL **Austin Corbett** Jr. Nevada

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LB **Calvin Munson** Sr. San Diego State

ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST

DE **Ricky Ali'ifua** Sr. Utah State
 DE **Alex Barrett** Sr. San Diego State
 DT **Nik D'Avanzo** Sr. New Mexico
 LB **Tau Lotulelei** Sr. UNLV
 LB **Calvin Munson** Sr. San Diego State
 LB **Dakota Cox** Sr. New Mexico
 LB **Christian Tago** Sr. San Jose State
 CB **Dameon Baber** So. Nevada
 CB **Damontae Kazee** Sr. San Diego State
 S **Weston Steelhammer** Jr. Air Force
 S **Andrew Wingard** So. Wyoming

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Tyler Rausa** Sr. Boise State
 P **Hayden Hunt** Sr. Colorado State
 RS **Rashaad Penny** Jr. San Diego State

Jeremy McNichols

Boise State's back: McNichols' 5.8 ypc is the best career clip of any Broncos RB (minimum 150 attempts).



1 Boise State

COACH Bryan Harsin [3rd season]
21–6 [2–0 in bowl games]

After a “down” 2015, the Broncos return eight offensive starters, restoring fans’ optimism. Anything but a New Year’s Six bowl will be unacceptable. —Carl Carchia

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Brett Rypien

The former four-star recruit—and nephew of Super Bowl-winning QB Mark Rypien—will try to build on his sensational freshman season (Mountain West—best 3,353 passing yards).

● X-FACTOR CB Jonathan Moxey

With the departures of safety Darian Thompson and star CB Donte Deayon (9 INTs combined last year), the Broncos could use a breakout year from Moxey, who had two picks in ‘15.

● POSITION BATTLE Defensive tackle

Boise State lost three D-line starters, so Matt Locher, a three-star recruit who redshirted last year, will compete with fellow redshirt freshman Sam Whitney and juco transfer Daniel Auelua.

THE PRESSER

● Rypien excelled under pressure last year: seven TDs (second best in the MW) and 24 passes of 20-plus yards against the blitz (first). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RYPIEN?** “He’s a superstar. He makes all the throws, plus he’s got a great feel for touch and knows when the ball has to come out.” —Mountain West head coach

● The Broncos’ prolific passing offense (310.2 ypg, best in the league) brings back four of its top five receivers, led by all-conference senior Thomas Sperbeck (school-record 1,412 yards, eight TDs in 2015). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SPERBECK?** “Sperbeck is back? Shoot! I was hoping he wasn’t. He’s the key to stopping them; third-and-6, that’s where the ball is going.” —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 [5–3]

BOWL GAME San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl vs. Northern Illinois, 55–7 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Brett Rypien: **3,353 yards**

RUSHING Jeremy McNichols: **1,337 yards**

RECEIVING Thomas Sperbeck: **1,412 yards**

TACKLES Ben Weaver: **68**

SACKS Kamalei Correa: **7**

INTERCEPTIONS Darian Thompson: **5**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.4

● **FPI CHANCE BOISE STATE WINS**

9/3 @ UL Lafayette **84%** ● **9/10** vs. Washington State **64%** ● **9/17** BYE ● **9/24** @ Oregon State **74%** ● **10/1** vs. Utah State **86%** ● **10/7** @ New Mexico **84%** ● **10/15** vs. Colorado State **92%** ● **10/20** vs. BYU **68%** ● **10/29** @ Wyoming **88%** ● **11/4** vs. San Jose State **84%** ● **11/12** @ Hawaii **89%** ● **11/18** vs. UNLV **95%** ● **11/25** @ Air Force **67%**

2 Air Force

COACH Troy Calhoun [10th season]
67–50 [3–5 in bowl games]

Who says Boise State owns the Mountain Division? Air Force won on the Smurf turf last year, took the division and is ready to defend it with 15 starters back. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Jacobi Owens

Owens, who is 1,466 yards from becoming Air Force’s leading career rusher, is the hammer in the Falcons’ triple-option. He averaged 99 ypg at fullback in the last eight games in ‘15.

● X-FACTOR RB Timothy McVey

McVey ran for six touchdowns in the final three regular-season games last year and is a crucial member of the RB corps—especially if he has to step up for the oft-injured Owens.

● POSITION BATTLE Center

The Falcons return just 40 starts along the offensive line. The two players vying for the center spot, sophomore Alex Norton and senior Dylan Vail, combine for just 14.

THE PRESSER

● Air Force’s perennially undersized defensive line ranked 31st in the FBS in TFLs [7.0 per game] and 19th in sacks [2.7 per game] in ‘15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THEY OVERCOME LACK OF SIZE?** “They are quick enough, and they slant and stunt well enough that it makes them hard to block, even when you have angles.” —Mountain West head coach

● The Falcons’ top target when they throw [12.1 attempts per game] is Jalen Robinette, whose 24.7 ypc would have been among the nation’s best had he qualified. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT COVERING ROBINETTE?** “I think he’s the best receiver in the league. He’s always one-on-one because of their offense, and ... he has all the advantages.” —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–6 [6–2]

BOWL GAME Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl vs. California, 55–36 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Karson Roberts: 1,595 yards

RUSHING Jacobi Owens: **1,092 yards**

RECEIVING Jalen Robinette: **641 yards**

TACKLES Weston Steelhammer: **80**

SACKS Alex Hansen: **7½**

INTERCEPTIONS Weston Steelhammer: **5**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.4

● **FPI CHANCE AIR FORCE WINS**

9/3 vs. Abilene Christian **98%** ● **9/10** vs. Georgia State **85%** ● **9/17** BYE ● **9/24** @ Utah State **55%** ● **10/1** vs. Navy **67%** ● **10/8** @ Wyoming **72%** ● **10/15** vs. New Mexico **72%** ● **10/22** vs. Hawaii **92%** ● **10/28** @ Fresno State **72%** ● **11/5** @ Army **64%** ● **11/12** vs. Colorado State **79%** ● **11/19** @ San Jose State **41%** ● **11/25** vs. Boise State **33%**

3 Utah State

COACH Matt Wells [4th season]
25–16 [2–1 in bowl games]

The cruel truth for USU fans: Just when the Aggies have achieved stability at QB, they're dealing with a defensive overhaul. The offense will have to carry the load. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON QB Kent Myers

Myers excelled last season in place of injured Chuckie Keeton: On Oct. 3, he gashed Colorado State for 191 yards rushing and 137 passing; on Nov. 14, he threw for 364 yards at Air Force.

● X-FACTOR RB Devante Mays

The juco transfer, who finished the year by running for 124 yards on 12 carries in the bowl loss, has a chance to run for more than 1,000 yards behind four returning OL starters.

● POSITION BATTLE Safety

Devin Centers, who started eight games as a junior and tied for the team lead in INTs, will compete for a bigger role this year with Jontrell Rocquemoire and BYU transfer Dallin Leavitt.

THE PRESSER

● USU is known for its attacking 3–4 D [111 sacks since '13, 11th most in the FBS], but its most experienced returner has just 13 career tackles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOSSES ON D?** "I thought last year they were going to take a step back, but they were just as good. They're transitioning to a more consistent program." —Mountain West head coach

● The Aggies ran [481 rushes] more than they threw [403 passes] and gained nearly a yard more per carry than opponents [4.5 to 3.6]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR RUNNING GAME?** "Their offensive line is a veteran group—wide and long. Mays runs well inside. He's a big-play threat." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 [5–3]

BOWL GAME Famous Idaho Potato Bowl vs. Akron, 23–21 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Kent Myers: **1,593 yards**

RUSHING Devante Mays: **966 yards**

RECEIVING Hunter Sharp: 835 yards

TACKLES Nick Vigil: 144

SACKS David Moala: 4½

INTERCEPTIONS Devin Centers: **3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2

● **FPI CHANCE UTAH STATE WINS**

9/1 vs. Weber State **96%** ● **9/10** @ USC **5%**
● **9/17** vs. Arkansas State **68%** ● **9/24** vs. Air Force **45%** ● **10/1** @ Boise State **14%** ● **10/8** @ Colorado State **57%** ● **10/15** BYE
● **10/22** vs. Fresno State **81%** ● **10/28** vs. San Diego State **47%** ● **11/5** @ Wyoming **63%**
● **11/12** vs. New Mexico **72%** ● **11/19** @ Nevada **51%** ● **11/26** @ BYU **21%**

4 New Mexico

COACH Bob Davie [5th season]
18–32 [0–1 in bowl games]

Thanks to a potent triple-option and an opportunistic defense, the Lobos last year reached their first bowl since 2007. Now the challenge is staying on the gas. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● ALL EYES ON RB Teriyon Gipson

Gipson will get his chance to shine in the Lobos' run-heavy offense now that Jhurrell Pressley is gone. The 5-foot-8, 182-pound senior ran for 850 yards and six TDs in a platoon last year.

● X-FACTOR S Daniel Henry

Henry, a junior college transfer who redshirted in 2014, is part of an experienced secondary that needs to eliminate the big plays. He had 72 tackles and a sack last year.

● POSITION BATTLE Center

Blaise Fountain, a 6-foot, 280-pound juco transfer, seems to have won coach Bob Davie's favor this spring, so he'll compete with senior Garrett Adcock, who has 19 career starts at right tackle.

THE PRESSER

● With a triple-option run out of the pistol formation, New Mexico ranked ninth in the FBS with 252.2 rushing ypg in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOBOS' VERSION OF THE OPTION?** "They find all sorts of different ways to end up in a triple-option look, but at the end of the day it's still stop the dive, the QB and the pitch." —Mountain West head coach

● The Lobos' 3–3–5 defense was 24th in the FBS with 25 takeaways but gave up big plays [75 plays of 20-plus yards, 17th most in the FBS]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR AGGRESSIVE D?** "It's feast or famine. If a guy doesn't get into a gap, you have a chance for a home run." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 [5–3]

BOWL GAME Gildan New Mexico Bowl vs. Arizona, 45–37 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Lamar Jordan: **1,045 yards**

RUSHING Jhurrell Pressley: 907 yards

RECEIVING Dameron Gamblin: **424 yards**

TACKLES Dakota Cox: **97**

SACKS Maurice Daniels: **5½**

INTERCEPTIONS Cranston Jones: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0

● **FPI CHANCE NEW MEXICO WINS**

9/3 vs. South Dakota **89%** ● **9/10** @ New Mexico State **68%** ● **9/17** @ Rutgers **21%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **10/1** vs. San Jose State **45%** ● **10/7** vs. Boise State **16%** ● **10/15** @ Air Force [Dallas] **28%** ● **10/22** vs. UL Monroe **86%** ● **10/29** @ Hawaii **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Nevada **52%** ● **11/12** @ Utah State **28%** ● **11/19** @ Colorado State **43%** ● **11/26** vs. Wyoming **66%**

5 Colorado State

COACH Mike Bobo [2nd season]
7-6 [0-1 in bowl games]

CSU's 10-win 2014 seems like ages ago: The Rams return just 10 starters and must somehow replace all-everything wideout Rashard Higgins. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

- 🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Izzy Matthews**
Matthews, a physical downhill runner, rushed for 590 yards on just 97 carries in 2015. The 6-foot, 215-pound sophomore averaged 6.5 yards per carry over the final five games.
- 🔴 **X-FACTOR WR Xavier Williams**
The Rams lost four leading receivers and TEs who combined for almost 2,000 yards in '15. Williams, who had 19 catches for 231 yards last year, must help take pressure off the rush.
- 🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Junior Nick Stevens wasn't terrible (21 TDs, 12 INTs), but he has competition from Faton Bauta, a dual-threat grad transfer who played under coach Mike Bobo at Georgia.

THE PRESSER

- 🔴 Bobo's power-run offense surged thanks to Matthews, a sophomore who helped Colorado State average a whopping 251 rush yards in the final five games of '15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MATTHEWS?** "You have to gang-tackle him. He's strong and usually makes a guy miss. He does a good job of advancing after first contact." —Mountain West head coach
- 🔴 The Rams must find three D-line starters for the new 3-4 scheme, but they return their top three LBs, led by senior Kevin Davis [14 TFLs]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DAVIS?** "You have to be aware of where he is. You make sure you're not in the wrong one-on-one matchup with him." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 [5-3]
BOWL GAME Nova Home Loans Arizona Bowl vs. Nevada, 28-23 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Nick Stevens: **2,679 yards**
RUSHING Dalyn Dawkins: **867 yards**
RECEIVING Rashard Higgins: 1,062 yards
TACKLES Kevin Davis: **101**
SACKS Joe Kawulok: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS Deandre Elliot: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.5
● **FPI CHANCE COLORADO STATE WINS**

9/2 vs. Colorado [Denver] **23%** ● **9/10** vs. UTSA **85%** ● **9/17** vs. Northern Colorado **96%** ● **9/24** @ Minnesota **16%** ● **10/1** vs. Wyoming **63%** ● **10/8** vs. Utah State **43%** ● **10/15** @ Boise State **8%** ● **10/22** @ UNLV **50%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Fresno State **70%** ● **11/12** @ Air Force **21%** ● **11/19** vs. New Mexico **57%** ● **11/26** @ San Diego State **17%**

6 Wyoming

COACH Craig Bohl [3rd season]
6-18 [0-0 in bowl games]

The Cowboys just missed a school-record 11 losses in '15, but they played 26 freshmen and lacked stability at QB. With 18 starters back, 2016 should be a step up. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

- 🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB Brian Hill**
Last year Hill led the conference in rush ypg [135.9] yet found himself less heralded than other MW RBs. With a chip on his shoulder and 10 added pounds of muscle, watch out.
- 🔴 **X-FACTOR LB Lucas Wacha**
The Cowboys run the Tampa 2 scheme, which requires excellent play from the MLB. Wacha, a 6-foot-1,230-pound senior who was second on the team with 96 tackles, must step up.
- 🔴 **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Sophomores Josh Allen and Nick Smith both looked good in limited play behind Cam Coffman last year. Whichever QB wins the job will be Wyoming's third starter in the past three years.

THE PRESSER

- 🔴 The Cowboys' pro-style offense is built around Hill, who ranked ninth in the FBS with a school-record 1,631 rush yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HILL?** "He's an incredibly talented downhill runner. You have to get him going east and west, and you have to gang-tackle him." —Mountain West head coach
- 🔴 An inexperienced secondary must improve to make up for a pass rush that was second worst in the FBS [10 sacks]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE YOUNG DBs?** "I think there'll be dramatic improvement. The free safety [Andrew Wingard] is as good as any. When you watch them on film, you can tell there's some athletic ability." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 [2-6]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Cameron Coffman: 1,951 yards
RUSHING Brian Hill: **1,631 yards**
RECEIVING Tanner Gentry: **678 yards**
TACKLES Andrew Wingard: **122**
SACKS Eddie Yarbrough: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Marcus Epps: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
● **FPI CHANCE WYOMING WINS**

9/3 vs. Northern Illinois **37%** ● **9/10** @ Nebraska **5%** ● **9/17** vs. UC Davis **94%** ● **9/23** @ Eastern Michigan **56%** ● **10/1** @ Colorado State **37%** ● **10/8** vs. Air Force **28%** ● **10/15** BYE ● **10/22** @ Nevada **33%** ● **10/29** vs. Boise State **12%** ● **11/5** vs. Utah State **37%** ● **11/12** @ UNLV **41%** ● **11/19** vs. San Diego State **27%** ● **11/26** @ New Mexico **34%**

1 San Diego State

COACH Rocky Long [6th season]
43–23 [2–3 in bowl games]

SDSU's run of nine straight wins led to its first outright conference title since 1986. The run-first squad returns offensive stars, but the defense has question marks. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Donnel Pumphrey

The 5-foot-9, 180-pound senior ran for 17 TDs in '15 and keys the Aztecs' offense. Pumphrey has an FBS-best 4,272 rush yards since '13.

X-FACTOR Defensive tackle

Replacing Christian Heyward (5½ TFLs) is critical. Sophomore Noble Hall (6 TFLs as a backup) and junior Sergio Phillips, who has shuttled back and forth from the OL, are in the mix.

POSITION BATTLE Right tackle

It won't make headlines, but losing All-MW RT Pearce Slater is huge for the seventh-most run-heavy team in the FBS. Sophs Joe Salcedo, who saw limited reps, and Ryan Pope, a scout-teamer, have their work cut out for them.

THE PRESSER

☛ Led by LB Calvin Munson (15 TFLs) and CB Damontae Kazee (8 INTs), the Aztecs notched the second-most takeaways (34) in the FBS last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "Those guys [Munson and Kazee] are great, but they don't rely on one guy. There's so many athletes on the field." —Mountain West head coach

☛ Sophomore QB Christian Chapman impressed in his only start (203 yards, one TD), but SDSU threw the seventh-fewest passes last year, so he won't be asked to do much. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING CHAPMAN?** "This isn't to offend him, but when you go against San Diego State, you first say, 'How are we going to stop the run game?'" —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–3 [8–0]

BOWL GAME Hawaii Bowl vs. Cincinnati, 42–7 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Maxwell Smith: 1,529 yards

RUSHING Donnel Pumphrey: 1,653 yards

RECEIVING Mikah Holder: 439 yards

TACKLES Calvin Munson: 98

SACKS Calvin Munson: 9½

INTERCEPTIONS Damontae Kazee: 8

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9

● **FPI CHANCE SAN DIEGO STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. New Hampshire **96%** ● **9/10** vs. California **44%** ● **9/17** @ Northern Illinois **49%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **10/1** @ South Alabama **85%** ● **10/8** vs. UNLV **87%** ● **10/14** @ Fresno State **75%** ● **10/21** vs. San Jose State **67%** ● **10/28** @ Utah State **54%** ● **11/5** vs. Hawaii **92%** ● **11/12** @ Nevada **63%** ● **11/19** @ Wyoming **73%** ● **11/26** vs. Colorado State **83%**

2 San Jose State

COACH Ron Caragher [4th season]
15–22 [1–0 in bowl games]

With 15 starters back and the maturation of a strong 2015 recruiting class (2nd in the Mountain West), SJSU could build on last year's three-win improvement. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON TE Billy Freeman

The Spartans lost playmaking RB Tyler Ervin, so Freeman (586 yards, six TDs) will be even more crucial. SJSU was 16th in TE targets in '15, and the senior nearly tripled his catch total (48) with the emergence of QB Kenny Potter.

X-FACTOR WR Bailey Gaither

SJSU desperately needs someone who can stretch the field; Gaither, a redshirt freshman who runs a 4.49 40, had a strong spring.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

The Spartans' defensive line ranked 122nd in tackles for loss (4.3 per game), so SJSU needs better production from seniors Isaiah Irving and Eugene Taylor, one of whom will start.

THE PRESSER

☛ The team's West Coast offense ranked 10th nationally in third-down efficiency (47.5 percent) and 18th in red zone efficiency (69.6 percent). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DEFENDING THE OFFENSE?** "You have to do a really good job of first-down defense. If they're always in second-and-medium, that's when they take their shots and run reverses." —Mountain West head coach

☛ SJSU boasted the nation's second-best pass defense (157.8 ypg), but teams won't throw if the run D doesn't improve (200.8 ypg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "When you're running the football with a lot of success, if you're halfway intelligent, you know you don't have to throw it." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 [4–4]

BOWL GAME AutoNation Cure Bowl vs. Georgia State, 27–16 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Kenny Potter: 1,984 yards

RUSHING Tyler Ervin: 1,601 yards

RECEIVING Billy Freeman: 586 yards

TACKLES Christian Tago: 125

SACKS Eugene Taylor: 3

INTERCEPTIONS Cleveland Wallace III: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.8

● **FPI CHANCE SAN JOSE STATE WINS**

9/3 @ Tulsa **39%** ● **9/10** vs. Portland State **92%** ● **9/17** vs. Utah **30%** ● **9/24** @ Iowa State **35%** ● **10/1** @ New Mexico **55%** ● **10/8** vs. Hawaii **89%** ● **10/15** vs. Nevada **71%** ● **10/21** @ San Diego State **33%** ● **10/29** vs. UNLV **83%** ● **11/4** @ Boise State **16%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** vs. Air Force **59%** ● **11/26** @ Fresno State **69%**

3 Nevada

COACH Brian Polian [4th season]
18–20 [1–1 in bowl games]

What do you get when you mix a Chip Kelly-style attack led by new OC Tim Cramsey and nine starters returning from last season's pistol offense? We'll see. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON RB James Butler**
Butler, a 5-foot-9, 200-pound junior who led the conference with 6.5 ypc, will still get the majority of carries, even with former Penn State starter and grad transfer Akeel Lynch in town.

● **X-FACTOR QB Tyler Stewart**
Nevada had two tailbacks run for more than 1,000 yards but ranked 113th in passing [164.5]. Stewart, a first-time starter as a junior, was 96th in yards per attempt [6.6].

● **POSITION BATTLE Linebacker**
The Pack must replace all three LBs. Juco transfer Austin Paulhus is battling redshirt freshman Gabe Sewell, a touted recruit who turned down Colorado, to man the middle.

THE PRESSER

● Cramsey, a Chip Kelly disciple who ran the Montana State offense the past three years, will try to inject life into an O that posted its lowest scoring output since 2003 [26.2 ppg]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEVADA'S NEW O?** "Cramsey is from the Chip Kelly lineage, so there'll be misdirection, a lot of motion, probably some tempo."
—Mountain West head coach

● The Wolf Pack won't ditch the pistol entirely; Butler likes running out of the formation. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING BUTLER OUT OF THE PISTOL?** "You can't tackle him one-on-one. You have to have enough guys at the line so there aren't any gaps for him to run through."
—Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 [4–4]
BOWL GAME Nova Home Loans Arizona Bowl vs. Colorado State, 28–23 W
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Tyler Stewart: **2,139 yards**
RUSHING James Butler: **1,342 yards**
RECEIVING Jerico Richardson: **750 yards**
TACKLES Asauni Rufus: **105**
SACKS Ian Seau: **10**
INTERCEPTIONS Dameon Baber: **6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0
● **FPI CHANCE NEVADA WINS**

9/3 vs. Cal Poly **88%** ● **9/10** @ Notre Dame **4%** ● **9/17** vs. Buffalo **77%** ● **9/24** @ Purdue **19%** ● **10/1** @ Hawaii **53%** ● **10/8** vs. Fresno State **70%** ● **10/15** @ San Jose State **29%** ● **10/22** vs. Wyoming **67%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ New Mexico **48%** ● **11/12** vs. San Diego State **37%** ● **11/19** vs. Utah State **49%** ● **11/26** @ UNLV **57%**

4 Fresno State

COACH Tim DeRuyter [5th season]
29–23 [0–3 in bowl games]

A new offensive coordinator and seven returning starters hope to rescue an attack that plummeted from third in the nation in 2013 to 121st in 2015. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON WR Jamire Jordan**
The 5-foot-10, 168-pound sophomore led the team in every receiving category [46/540/5] but must make better use of his targets; he caught only 47.9 percent of the 96 balls thrown his way.

● **X-FACTOR OC Eric Kiesau**
An analyst at Alabama in 2015 and former OC at Washington, Kansas and Colorado, Kiesau helped install the Tide's up-tempo attack.

● **POSITION BATTLE Quarterback**
Sophomores Chason Virgil and Kilton Anderson are battling to put an end to the merry-go-round [five starters since Derek Carr left in '13]. Anderson finished the year strong, but Virgil is the more highly regarded prospect.

THE PRESSER

● Fresno State's pass-happy offense sputtered with four different starting QBs and finished 107th in the FBS [178.3 ypg]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STRUGGLING PASSING GAME?** "They yanked [guys] so much. I don't even think they knew on Monday who the guy was going to be."
—Mountain West head coach

● The Bulldogs had 21 players who made their first career start in '15. That youth showed on defense, where they ranked 116th in rush yards allowed [234.7] and 115th in rush TDs [32]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "They are extremely aggressive. When you're youthful and you play that defense, you're going to give up a lot of big plays."
—Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 [2–6]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Zack Greenlee: 866 yards
RUSHING Marteze Waller: 920 yards
RECEIVING Jamire Jordan: **540 yards**
TACKLES Ejiro Ederaine: 99
SACKS Ejiro Ederaine: 9
INTERCEPTIONS Tyquan Glass: **4**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
● **FPI CHANCE FRESNO STATE WINS**

9/3 @ Nebraska **4%** ● **9/10** vs. Sacramento State **95%** ● **9/17** @ Toledo **22%** ● **9/24** vs. Tulsa **35%** ● **10/1** @ UNLV **44%** ● **10/8** @ Nevada **30%** ● **10/14** vs. San Diego State **25%** ● **10/22** @ Utah State **19%** ● **10/28** vs. Air Force **29%** ● **11/5** @ Colorado State **30%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** vs. Hawaii **75%** ● **11/26** vs. San Jose State **31%**

5 UNLV

A year removed from coaching a local high school, Tony Sanchez (85-5 at Bishop Gorman High) has given the Rebels cause for optimism. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Devonte Boyd

The Mountain West's freshman of the year in 2014 hauled in 54 passes for 904 yards and seven TDs as a sophomore and ranked second in the conference with 16.7 yards per catch.

X-FACTOR MLB Brian Keyes

The Rebels' rush defense gave up 217.5 ypg in 2015, so the arrival of Keyes, a 6-foot-1, 255-pound juco transfer, is welcomed.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Kurt Palandech appeared in 11 games last year but finished with a QBR of 39.4. That opens the door for juco transfer Johnny Stanton, a dual threat who had offers from California, Oregon and Wisconsin.

THE PRESSER

Sanchez's arrival led to a 66-spot jump in rush offense (193.7 ypg) and a 38-spot bump in scoring offense (28.6 ppg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SANCHEZ'S YEAR 1 IMPACT?** "I think he has excited that program and that town about football. I thought he brought in some great assistants. I say arrow up for UNLV." —Mountain West head coach

Palandech, who passed for 794 yards and ran for 293 in '15, will compete with Stanton for the QB spot. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PALANDECH?** "Kurt can hurt you with his legs. He's scary that way. Is he going to beat you consistently with his arm? I remember we didn't think so." —Mountain West head coach

COACH Tony Sanchez [2nd season]
3-9 [0-0 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [2-6]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Blake Decker: 1,713 yards

RUSHING Keith Whitely: 711 yards

RECEIVING Devonte Boyd: 904 yards

TACKLES Ryan McAleenan: 85

SACKS Tau Lotulelei: 3

INTERCEPTIONS Tim Hough: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7

● **FPI CHANCE UNLV WINS**

9/1 vs. Jackson State **98%** ● 9/10 @ UCLA **3%** ● 9/17 @ Central Michigan **18%** ● 9/24 vs. Idaho **66%** ● 10/1 vs. Fresno State **56%** ● 10/8 @ San Diego State **13%** ● 10/15 @ Hawaii **40%** ● 10/22 vs. Colorado State **50%** ● 10/29 @ San Jose State **18%** ● 11/5 BYE ● 11/12 vs. Wyoming **59%** ● 11/18 @ Boise State **5%** ● 11/26 vs. Nevada **43%**

6 Hawaii

Nick Rolovich returns to Hawaii, where he was a star QB (2000-01) and revered assistant (2008-11), after four seasons as the OC at Mountain West rival Nevada. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Paul Harris

Harris tied a school record with four straight 100-yard games en route to becoming Hawaii's second 1,000-yard rusher since 1992.

X-FACTOR LB Jahlani Tavai

Tavai started 11 games and had three sacks at OLB as a redshirt freshman. Rolovich has called the 6-foot-4, 235-pound sophomore "a name the league will know in the next few years."

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Ikaika Woolsey, Beau Reilly and Aaron Zwahlen will fight for the starting job—Zwahlen, an ESPN 300 recruit who returned from a two-year mission last year, might have the edge.

THE PRESSER

The OL returns four starters, and the rush attack finished strong, averaging 215 yards over the final three games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE?** "I think protection-wise they weren't as good as they were in the run game, but most teams make a leap when they have guys back." —Mountain West head coach

Rolovich's newly hired OC, Zak Hill, left for Boise State just 48 days in, so the job has been divvied up among his staff. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CHANGE IN PHILOSOPHY?** "I'm not sure [what to expect]. They had very good balance. They found ways to create a running game while also spreading you out and throwing the ball." —Mountain West head coach

COACH Nick Rolovich [1st season]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-10 [0-8]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Max Wittek: 1,542 yards

RUSHING Paul Harris: 1,132 yards

RECEIVING Marcus Kemp: 563 yards

TACKLES Julian Gener: 95

SACKS Kennedy Tulimasealii: 3½

INTERCEPTIONS Dany Mulanga: 1

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.1

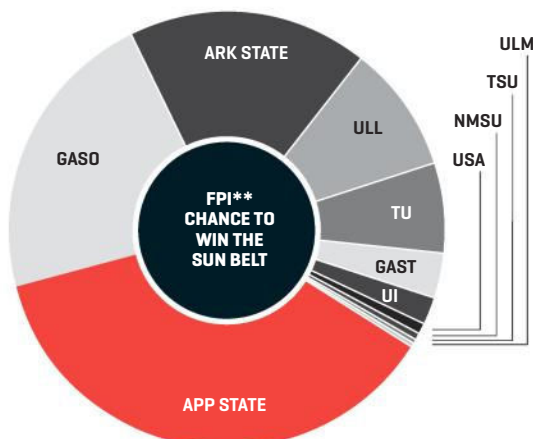
● **FPI CHANCE HAWAII WINS**

8/27 vs. California [Sydney, Australia] **13%** ● 9/3 @ Michigan **1%** ● 9/10 vs. Tennessee-Martin **85%** ● 9/17 @ Arizona **3%** ● 9/24 BYE ● 10/1 vs. Nevada **47%** ● 10/8 @ San Jose State **11%** ● 10/15 vs. UNLV **60%** ● 10/22 @ Air Force **9%** ● 10/29 vs. New Mexico **50%** ● 11/5 @ San Diego State **8%** ● 11/12 vs. Boise State **11%** ● 11/19 @ Fresno State **25%** ● 11/26 vs. Massachusetts **83%**

SUN BELT

Sun Belt outlook

	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN CONFERENCE*
APPALACHIAN STATE	67	57.1%
GEORGIA SOUTHERN	81	33.1%
ARKANSAS STATE	88	27.2%
UL LAFAYETTE	98	13.6%
TROY	96	10.4%
GEORGIA STATE	103	5.4%
IDAHO	118	3.4%
SOUTH ALABAMA	120	1.0%
NEW MEXICO STATE	121	0.5%
TEXAS STATE	126	0.3%
UL MONROE	127	0.2%



*Percentages add up to more than 100 because the Sun Belt doesn't play a title game or break first-place ties. FPI projects a team's likelihood of having at least a share of first place.

**For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

AVERAGE
FPI RANK
104.1

PROJECTED
CHAMPION
57%
APPALACHIAN
STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB **Larry Rose III** Jr. New Mexico State

ALL-SUN BELT

QB	Taylor Lamb	Jr.	Appalachian State
RB	Matt Breida	Sr.	Georgia Southern
RB	Larry Rose III	Jr.	New Mexico State
WR	Robert Davis	Sr.	Georgia State
WR	Penny Hart	So.	Georgia State
TE	Gerald Everett	Sr.	South Alabama
OL	Andy Kwon	Sr.	Georgia Southern
OL	Parker Collins	Sr.	Appalachian State
OL	Antonio Garcia	Sr.	Troy
OL	Jemar Clark	Sr.	Arkansas State
OL	Colton Jackson	Sr.	Arkansas State

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE **Ja'Von Rolland-Jones** Jr. Arkansas State

ALL-SUN BELT

DE	Ja'Von Rolland-Jones	Jr.	Arkansas State
DE	Bernard Dawson	Sr.	Georgia Southern
DT	Jay Ellison	Sr.	Georgia Southern
DL	Stody Bradley	Jr.	New Mexico State
LB	John Law	Sr.	Appalachian State
LB	Eric Boggs	Jr.	Appalachian State
LB	Xavier Woodson-Luster	Sr.	Arkansas State
CB	Latrell Gibbs	Jr.	Appalachian State
CB	Jeremy Reaves	Jr.	South Alabama
S	Cody Brown	Sr.	Arkansas State
S	Savion Brown	Sr.	UL Lafayette

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	Austin Rehkow	Sr.	Idaho
P	Austin Rehkow	Sr.	Idaho
RS	Blaise Taylor	Jr.	Arkansas State

Larry Rose III

Don't sleep on the Aggies dynamo, who led all Group of 5 rushers with 137.6 ypg, good for seventh in the FBS.



ANDRES LEIGHTON/AP IMAGES

1 Appalachian State

COACH Scott Satterfield (4th season)
22-15 (1-0 in bowl games)

What would top an 11-win effort in App State's second year of FBS play? Try a Sun Belt title in its third. A loaded backfield and stingy D could help it get there. —Max Tyler

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Marcus Cox

The 5-foot-10, 200-pound senior ran for fewer than 75 yards just once last year [a 74-yard effort vs. Arkansas State] and will try for his fourth straight 1,000-yard season.

X-FACTOR RB Jalin Moore

Moore made a midseason start with an injured Cox sidelined—and gained 244 yards. His 7.4 yards per carry on the season was second best in the Sun Belt.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback

App State boasts one of the league's best DBs in Latrell Gibbs (two pick-sixes in 2015), but it needs a complement to emerge in either Tae Hayes, Mondo Williams or Brandon Pinckney.

THE PRESSER

QB Taylor Lamb was quietly solid in '15 (70.3 QBR) but proved capable of fireworks too: He led the Sun Belt in TD passes of 20-plus yards [15]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT LAMB DOES BEST?** "He benefits from a great run game with Cox, so you see a lot of explosive throws based off of play-action. He throws the deep ball really well." —Sun Belt head coach

The pass defense bottled up big plays in 2015, allowing just 85 throws of 10-plus yards, ninth fewest in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORKS VS. THE D?** "If you're one-dimensional, they can eat you up. Being able to throw the ball effectively and staying really up-tempo are the two main things against them." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11-2 (7-1)

BOWL GAME Raycom Media Camellia Bowl vs. Ohio, 31-29 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Taylor Lamb: **2,387 yards**

RUSHING Marcus Cox: **1,423 yards**

RECEIVING Simms McElfresh: 466 yards

TACKLES Eric Boggs: **104**

SACKS Ronald Blair: 7½

INTERCEPTIONS Latrell Gibbs: **7**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.2

● **FPI CHANCE APPALACHIAN STATE WINS**

9/3 @ Tennessee **5%** ● **9/10** vs. Old Dominion **87%** ● **9/17** vs. Miami [Fla.] **27%** ● **9/24** @ Akron **78%** ● **10/1** vs. Georgia State **82%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/12** @ UL Lafayette **66%** ● **10/22** vs. Idaho **91%** ● **10/27** @ Georgia Southern **52%** ● **11/5** vs. Texas State **94%** ● **11/12** @ Troy **67%** ● **11/19** vs. UL Monroe **94%** ● **11/26** @ New Mexico State **83%** ● **12/3** BYE

2 Georgia Southern

COACH Tyson Summers (1st season)

New coach Tyson Summers won't overhaul a triple-option that's not broken—363.0 rush ypg, best in the FBS—especially with the five top rushers back in 2016. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Ironhead Gallon

The Eagles lose a disruptor in LB Antwone Williams (10½ TFLs) but will look to Gallon (don't call him Deshawntee) to uphold a stingy front: 131.8 rush ypg allowed, No. 2 in the Sun Belt.

X-FACTOR RB Wesley Fields

It's a pick-your-poison backfield. Fields, a third option, complements the league's steadiest runner, teammate Matt Breida (7.9 ypc, No. 1 in the Sun Belt), with 6.8 ypc (No. 4).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Both members of last year's QB tandem return, and while Kevin Ellison and Favian Upshaw are prolific runners (1,295 yards in '15), they combined for more INTs (10) than pass TDs (four).

THE PRESSER

Behind Breida, the Eagles were outrushed just twice last year, while 30.6 percent of their carries went for a first down or TD (No. 9 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT A WINNING FORMULA VS. THE TRIPLE-OPTION?** "Last year we were able to contain their running game playing gap-sound football while running the ball ourselves. If you can outrush them, that's huge." —Sun Belt head coach

Gone are five DBs who combined for 76 percent of the team's pass breakups in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THOSE HOLES?** "You try to get matchups on guys you feel can't do something. If a guy has a problem transitioning out of his backpedal, then you'll isolate him one-on-one." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4 (6-2)

BOWL GAME GoDaddy Bowl

vs. Bowling Green, 58-27 W

TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)

PASSING Kevin Ellison: **597 yards**

RUSHING Matt Breida: **1,608 yards**

RECEIVING BJ Johnson III: **249 yards**

TACKLES Antwone Williams: 107

SACKS Bernard Dawson: **4**

INTERCEPTIONS Antonio Glover: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1

● **FPI CHANCE GEORGIA SOUTHERN WINS**

9/3 vs. Savannah State **99%** ● **9/10** @ South Alabama **78%** ● **9/17** vs. UL Monroe **92%** ● **9/24** @ Western Michigan **25%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/5** @ Arkansas State **49%** ● **10/15** @ Georgia Tech **23%** ● **10/22** @ New Mexico State **77%** ● **10/27** vs. Appalachian State **48%** ● **11/5** @ Ole Miss **5%** ● **11/10** vs. UL Lafayette **74%** ● **11/19** @ Georgia State **65%** ● **11/26** BYE ● **12/3** vs. Troy **76%**

3 Arkansas State

COACH Blake Anderson [3rd season]
16–10 [0–2 in bowl games]

No leading passer, rusher or receiver coming back? No problem. The Sun Belt's standard-bearer (four of the past five conference titles) has stockpiled speed again. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON DE** Ja'Von Rolland-Jones
All-Sun Belt as a sophomore, the 6-foot-2, 231-pounder had nine sacks [one each against USC and Missouri] and forced four fumbles.

🔴 **X-FACTOR WR** Cameron Echols-Luper
The speedy get speedier thanks to TCU transfer [and track star] Echols-Luper. He ran back four punts for 20-plus yards in '14 [T13 in the FBS].

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE** Quarterback
It's a three-man race among sophomore James Tabary, who was hot and cold as the No. 2 last year; former ESPN 300 Oklahoma signee Justice Hansen, a mobile pro-style sophomore; and Cameron Birse, an improving but inconsistent junior.

THE PRESSER

🔴 The O-line has two All-Sun Belt veterans and must mask a hemorrhaging of skill-spot weapons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TRENCH PLAY?** "They get you out on the edge and the QB runs, so you've got to get the offensive line thinking to slow it down. Show blitz from one side and bring it from the other." —Sun Belt head coach

🔴 Don't expect to get away with turning the ball over. ASU led the nation in points off TOs [144]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO AVOID GETTING BURNED?** "They're extremely fast and pressure the QB, causing bad throws. Counter that by avoiding bad decisions. Go ahead and take a sack or throw the ball away instead of forcing it." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 [8–0]
BOWL GAME R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl vs. Louisiana Tech, 47–28 L
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Fredi Knighten: 1,835 yards
RUSHING Michael Gordon: 1,057 yards
RECEIVING Tres Hudson: 615 yards
TACKLES Khari Lain: **81**
SACKS Ja'Von Rolland-Jones: **9**
INTERCEPTIONS Rocky Hayes: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3
● **FPI CHANCE ARKANSAS STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. Toledo **57%** ● **9/10** @ Auburn **7%** ● **9/17** @ Utah State **32%** ● **9/24** vs. Central Arkansas **90%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/5** vs. Georgia Southern **51%** ● **10/15** vs. South Alabama **82%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. UL Monroe **90%** ● **11/3** @ Georgia State **57%** ● **11/12** vs. New Mexico State **84%** ● **11/17** @ Troy **50%** ● **11/26** @ UL Lafayette **51%** ● **12/3** @ Texas State **78%**

4 UL Lafayette

COACH Mark Hudspeth [6th season]
40–24* [4–0 in bowl games]

After four straight 9–4 campaigns, the Ragin' Cajuns limped to four wins in 2015. Shoring up shaky play up front—on both sides—is the first order of business. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

🔴 **ALL EYES ON RB** Elijah McGuire
Even with limited outside weapons to draw defenders out of the box, McGuire ran for 13 TDs and caught three more. In all, he gained 30 percent of the Ragin' Cajuns' offensive yards.

🔴 **X-FACTOR CB** Simeon Thomas
Eligibility issues have kept Thomas off the field since his 2013 freshman season [nine games, two pass breakups], but Mark Hudspeth tabs him as one of the team's standout tacklers.

🔴 **POSITION BATTLE** Guard
A new face in the interior—redshirt frosh Robert Hunt, who took starting reps in the spring—will look to solidify an O-line that afforded McGuire little breathing room last year.

THE PRESSER

🔴 A three-QB carousel spun all last year [6.5 ypa, No. 100 in the FBS], but Brooks Haack transferred and Jalen Nixon shifted to running back. So the last QB standing from the 2015 merry-go-round, soph Jordan Davis, will take on redshirt freshman Chris Weaver for starting reps. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSIVE GAME PLAN?** "They try to run the ball down your throat. You have to make them throw the ball to win." —Sun Belt head coach

🔴 ULL's 73.4 defensive QBR ranked ninth in the league last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D?** "Be up-tempo and try to get into one-on-ones. Every time you can get them into man coverage, if you can take a deep shot, that's profitable." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–8 [3–5]
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]
PASSING Brooks Haack: 1,407 yards
RUSHING Elijah McGuire: **1,058** yards
RECEIVING Jamal Robinson: 824 yards
TACKLES Dominique Tovell: 79
SACKS Dominique Tovell: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Savion Brown: **3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2
● **FPI CHANCE UL LAFAYETTE WINS**

9/3 vs. Boise State **17%** ● **9/10** vs. McNeese State **82%** ● **9/17** vs. South Alabama **78%** ● **9/24** @ Tulane **51%** ● **10/1** @ New Mexico State **65%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/12** vs. Appalachian State **34%** ● **10/22** @ Texas State **73%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Idaho **76%** ● **11/10** @ Georgia Southern **26%** ● **11/19** @ Georgia **3%** ● **11/26** vs. Arkansas State **49%** ● **12/3** @ UL Monroe **71%**

*Adjusted to 18–24 by NCAA

5 Troy

A friendly slate—just one Power 5 tilt and Sun Belt heavyweights Appalachian State and Arkansas State at home—could bolster the win column. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Rashad Dillard

After a medical redshirt [hip] in 2014, Dillard made 9 TFLs, second most on the team last year. He must maintain that play in '16 without disruptive DE Tyler Roberts at the other end.

X-FACTOR QB Brandon Silvers

He completed 61.2 percent of his passes in '15 [No. 3 in the Sun Belt] but flatlined in close games: 5 INTs in six- and three-point losses to South Alabama and Appalachian State.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line

The interior failed to get push last year—see Troy's 119.1 rush ypg—so despite returners with starting reps [Xavier Fields, Deontae Crumitie at guard], spots are up for grabs.

THE PRESSER

Silvers connected with four wideouts for three-plus TDs each last year. Only junior Emanuel Thompson is back, so new targets will get looks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SILVERS?** "He can distribute the football. You've got to try to create confusion for him whenever he is throwing." —Sun Belt head coach

The D turned around in a big way, registering 29 sacks [12 more than 2014's total] and climbing from No. 107 to No. 57 in the FBS in ypg allowed [391.3]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "They create mismatches. Your running back has to block their linebackers off the edge, and that creates a lot of sacks. The biggest way to combat that is to not always be in a dropback series." —Sun Belt head coach

COACH Neal Brown [2nd season]
4-8 [0-0 in bowl games]

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 [3-5]

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Brandon Silvers: **2,378 yards**

RUSHING Brandon Burks: 1,005 yards

RECEIVING Teddy Ruben: 879 yards

TACKLES Montres Kitchens: 79

SACKS Rashad Dillard: **7**

INTERCEPTIONS Lamarcus Farmer: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.7

● **FPI CHANCE TROY WINS**

9/3 vs. Austin Peay **99%** ● **9/10** @ Clemson **1%** ● **9/17** @ Southern Miss **35%** ● **9/24** vs. New Mexico State **81%** ● **10/1** @ Idaho **54%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Georgia State **68%** ● **10/20** @ South Alabama **65%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Massachusetts **87%** ● **11/12** vs. Appalachian State **33%** ● **11/17** vs. Arkansas State **50%** ● **11/26** @ Texas State **72%** ● **12/3** @ Georgia Southern **24%**

6 Georgia State

Trent Miles transformed 2014's one-win squad into a bowl team. Despite QB concerns, a plethora of weapons will help his bid for a second postseason run. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Penny Hart

At 5-foot-8, 170 pounds, he's the biggest little man on campus. Hart's 1,099 receiving yards and eight TDs were second among all FBS freshman receivers last year.

X-FACTOR The cornerbacks

Chandon Sullivan and Jerome Smith were solid in 2015—94 total tackles, 3 INTs—but Miles tabs the duo for more pressure looks this fall.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

Four candidates will vie to replace 2015's Sun Belt POY, Nick Arbuckle, including dynamic graduate transfer Conner Manning [Utah], a former three-star recruit who passed for 4,219 yards as a high school junior.

THE PRESSER

Hart led the Sun Belt with seven catches of 40-plus yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CONTAIN HIM?** "You've got to get to the QB. Make the ball come out high or low so Hart doesn't catch the ball on the move and hit the seam. If he hits those seams, he's going to the end zone." —Sun Belt head coach

Opposing passers were rarely rattled in 2015, with the Panthers sacking QBs on just 3.8 percent of plays, No. 119 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON THAT DEFICIENCY?** "You don't say, 'Well, they don't have a good pass rush, so we're going to throw it every down.' But maybe there's a matchup or two you exploit. Maybe you have the time to make a double move." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 [5-3]

BOWL GAME AutoNation Cure Bowl vs. San Jose State, 27-16 L

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Nick Arbuckle: 4,368 yards

RUSHING Glenn Smith: **356 yards**

RECEIVING Penny Hart: **1,099 yards**

TACKLES Joseph Peterson: 116

SACKS Mackendy Cheridor: **3**

INTERCEPTIONS Tarris Batiste: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6

● **FPI CHANCE GEORGIA STATE WINS**

9/2 vs. Ball State **63%** ● **9/10** @ Air Force **15%** ● **9/17** @ Wisconsin **5%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **10/1** @ Appalachian State **18%** ● **10/8** vs. Texas State **81%** ● **10/15** @ Troy **32%** ● **10/22** vs. UT Martin **83%** ● **10/29** @ South Alabama **57%** ● **11/3** vs. Arkansas State **43%** ● **11/12** vs. UL Monroe **81%** ● **11/19** vs. Georgia Southern **35%** ● **11/26** BYE ● **12/3** @ Idaho **50%**

7 Idaho

COACH Paul Petrino [4th season]
6-29 (0-0 in bowl games)

The Sun Belt won't renew with Idaho past 2017, but before the Vandals leave, they will look to end a six-year bowl drought. QB Matt Linehan is the pivot point. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Matt Linehan

The son of Dallas Cowboys OC Scott Linehan had a 63.8 QBR as Idaho scored 30.3 ppg—its best clip since 2009.

X-FACTOR The offensive line

The Big Uglies by the numbers: four returning starters; 83 career starts; 6-foot-5½ and 307 pounds on average. Those measurables will prove crucial in opening lanes for a duo of backs taking over for Elijah Penny, who accounted for nearly 75 percent of all RB carries last year.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker

Redshirt freshmen Darius Liles and Mike Linehan [Matt's brother] compete to anchor a D that gave up 42.1 ppg [T122 in the FBS].

THE PRESSER

● No Sun Belt QB was more accurate than Linehan in 2015: 63.4 completion percentage.

COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LINEHAN'S

STRENGTHS? "He's a guy where, if you allow him to sit in one spot, it will be a long day. You have to make him uncomfortable. Change things that he sees to make him hold on to the ball a little bit longer." —Sun Belt head coach

● A secondary that returns almost entirely intact will aim to improve its 7.9 ypa allowed, No. 100 in the FBS last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "The biggest thing was spreading them out with formations, getting a lot of four- and five-WR looks and making them play in space. We felt like we had an advantage athletically in space." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 (3-5)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Matt Linehan: **2,992 yards**

RUSHING Elijah Penny: 1,163 yards

RECEIVING Dezmon Epps: 757 yards

TACKLES Broc Westlake: 87

SACKS Quinton Bradley: 6

INTERCEPTIONS Marc Millan: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0

● **FPI CHANCE IDAHO WINS**

9/1 vs. Montana State **79%** ● **9/10** @ Washington **2%** ● **9/17** @ Washington State **5%** ● **9/24** @ UNLV **34%** ● **10/1** vs. Troy **47%** ● **10/8** @ UL Monroe **55%** ● **10/15** vs. New Mexico State **65%** ● **10/22** @ Appalachian State **9%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ UL Lafayette **24%** ● **11/12** @ Texas State **55%** ● **11/19** BYE ● **11/26** vs. South Alabama **72%** ● **12/3** vs. Georgia State **50%**

8 South Alabama

COACH Joey Jones [8th season]
42-35 (0-1 in bowl games)

No sure answer at QB. No rushers to get to the QB. For the Jags to match 2015's five wins, they'll need their versatile tight end and new-look D to mask those holes. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON TE Gerald Everett

The UAB transfer led the Jaguars in receptions [41], yards [575] and TDs [eight], and even proved useful in the run game. Everett rushed for four more scores on eight attempts last year.

X-FACTOR New DC Kane Wommack

Opponents hit pay dirt on 76.9 percent of red zone drives, third most in the FBS. Wommack hopes to stanch that via a 4-2-5, a new look that will leverage his wealth of aggressive DBs.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback

A trio of sophomores—last year's backup Dallas Davis and transfers Cole Garvin [Marshall] and Evan Orth [UAB]—are largely untested. Only Davis has seen collegiate action [23 attempts].

THE PRESSER

● Everett's 14.0 ypc was the sixth-highest clip among FBS tight ends last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO KEEP EVERETT IN CHECK?** "You have to limit his catches, and that may mean rolling the coverage toward him or doubling him." —Sun Belt head coach

● The hope for Wommack's 4-2-5? That it will slow down the Sun Belt's glut of up-tempo spreads. South Alabama allowed 35.8 ppg in league play last year [fourth most in the conference]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO GAME-PLAN FOR A 4-2-5?** "There's a lot more opportunity to read defensive ends to run your zone schemes. Maybe you run a little bit more pin and pull, you run a little bit more outside scheme." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 (3-5)

BOWL GAME None

TEAM LEADERS [returners in bold]

PASSING Cody Clemments: 2,272 yards

RUSHING Xavier Johnson: **956 yards**

RECEIVING Gerald Everett: **575 yards**

TACKLES Blake Dees: 102

SACKS Akeem Lewis: 2

INTERCEPTIONS E.J. May: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.0

● **FPI CHANCE SOUTH ALABAMA WINS**

9/3 @ Mississippi State **2%** ● **9/10** vs. Georgia Southern **23%** ● **9/17** @ UL Lafayette **22%** ● **9/24** vs. Nicholls State **96%** ● **10/1** vs. San Diego State **15%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Arkansas State **18%** ● **10/20** vs. Troy **35%** ● **10/29** vs. Georgia State **43%** ● **11/5** @ UL Monroe **52%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** @ LSU **1%** ● **11/26** @ Idaho **28%** ● **12/3** vs. New Mexico State **63%**

9 New Mexico State

COACH Doug Martin [4th season]
7-29 [0-0 in bowl games]

The Aggies haven't gone bowling since the Eisenhower administration. Don't look for any happier days with a D this dreadful (No. 124 in the FBS last year). —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON RB Larry Rose III**
Only three FBS players had more than Rose's three games of 200-plus rush yards in 2015: Wyoming's Brian Hill, Leonard Fournette and Derrick Henry. Not bad company. He is an aerial threat too: 30 catches, 283 yards and two TDs.

THE PRESSER

● DB Terrill Hanks amassed 6½ TFLs, second most on the team, as a true freshman in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO BEAT HANKS?** "He's long and rangy. You've got to try to fatigue him so he has to play at your tempo, not his." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [3-5]
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.3
● **FPI CHANCE NMSU WINS**

9/3 @ UTEP **43%** ● **9/10** vs. New Mexico **32%**
● **9/17** @ Kentucky **6%** ● **9/24** @ Troy **19%** ●
10/1 vs. UL Lafayette **35%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15**
@ Idaho **35%** ● **10/22** vs. Georgia Southern **23%**
● **10/29** @ Texas A&M **1%** ● **11/5** BYE ● **11/12**
@ Arkansas State **16%** ● **11/19** vs. Texas State
65% ● **11/26** vs. Appalachian State **17%** ●
12/3 @ South Alabama **37%**

10 Texas State

COACH Everett Withers [1st season]

The already-fast Bobcats want to play even faster (stated goal: 90 snaps per game), but even record-setting pace on offense can't atone for a porous defense. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver**
Last year's top four pass catchers are gone, which leaves junior Demun Mercer—with 19 catches—as the leading returner. Look for red-shirt freshman Justin Gamble, who impressed in fall camp last year, to vie for reps.

THE PRESSER

● The Bobcats surrendered 60 plays of 25-plus yards in 2015, third most in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO EXPLOIT THE D?** "We created explosion plays and were able to get out in front. That's the biggest thing when you play them." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 [2-6]
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.4
● **FPI CHANCE TEXAS ST. WINS**

9/3 @ Ohio **18%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** @ Arkansas
2% ● **9/24** vs. Houston **7%** ● **10/1** vs. Incarnate
Word **93%** ● **10/8** @ Georgia State **19%** ● **10/15**
@ UL Monroe **42%** ● **10/22** vs. UL Lafayette **27%**
● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Appalachian State **6%**
● **11/12** vs. Idaho **45%** ● **11/19** @ New Mexico
State **35%** ● **11/26** vs. Troy **28%** ● **12/3** vs.
Arkansas State **22%**

11 UL Monroe

COACH Matt Viator [1st season]

The Warhawks, Sun Belt cellar dwellers in 2015, won't find 2016 much friendlier. Their 21.0 ppg ranked 111th in the FBS last year. And their 36.5 allowed? 112th. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

● **ALL EYES ON QB Garrett Smith**
On this offense (310.8 ypg, No. 122 in the FBS), even modest production is a plus. As a redshirt freshman last year, Smith tossed 17 TDs [No. 5 in the Sun Belt] and found classmate Marcus Green for 15 gains of 10-plus yards.

THE PRESSER

● ULM's seven rush TDs ranked last in the Sun Belt—and was half the next-lowest total [Troy]. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON A WEAK RUSH?** "If a team is struggling to run, we're going to load the box to make them one-dimensional." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-11 [1-7]
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.3
● **FPI CHANCE ULM WINS**

9/3 vs. Southern **90%** ● **9/10** @ Oklahoma **1%**
● **9/17** @ Georgia Southern **8%** ● **9/24** BYE
● **10/1** @ Auburn **2%** ● **10/8** vs. Idaho **45%**
● **10/15** vs. Texas State **58%** ● **10/22** @ New
Mexico **14%** ● **10/29** @ Arkansas State **10%** ●
11/5 vs. South Alabama **48%** ● **11/12** @ Georgia
State **19%** ● **11/19** @ Appalachian State **6%** ●
11/26 BYE ● **12/3** vs. UL Lafayette **29%**

RECRUIT WATCH

2016 Top 25 Classes

Since '06, every national champ has reeled in a top-10 recruiting class the year before its title. So yeah, 'crootin' matters. Here's a roll call of the top classes of 2016.

1 FLORIDA STATE

For the first time in five years, a team *not* named Alabama tops the rankings. The Noles dethroned the Tide thanks in no small part to a slew of signing-day blue-chip preps: Six of FSU's 16 ESPN 300 prospects, including CB Carlos Becker (Kissimmee, Fla.; ESPN 300: No. 46), committed on Feb. 3.

2 ALABAMA

Don't look for a drop-off in the Tide's trenches: Bama landed a bevy of big men to open up holes for the nation's top-ranked running back, B.J. Emmons (Morganton, N.C.; No. 33). Leading the way will be the No. 3 OT, Jonah Williams (Folsom, Calif.; No. 25), the No. 3 OG, Chris Owens (Arlington, Texas; No. 76) and the nation's best juco prospect, OT Charles Baldwin (Windsor, Conn.).

3 LSU

The Tigers began Feb. 3 with the nation's top class, and despite a two-spot drop by day's end, their laser focus on the D-line and secondary paid dividends—11 of LSU's 19 ESPN 300 signees line up on one of those two units. DT Rashard Lawrence (Monroe, La.; No. 12) and CB Kristian Fulton (Metairie, La.; No. 27) top the list.

4 OLE MISS

After falling out of recruiting's top 15 last year, Ole Miss bounced back in a big way in 2016, inking two top-10 ESPN 300 prospects: OT Gregory Little (Allen, Texas; No. 2) and DT Benito Jones (Waynesboro, Miss.; No. 7). The Rebels did more than just dominate the trenches, though, stockpiling seven ESPN 300 skill players, compared with just three in 2015.

5 OHIO STATE

The Buckeyes staved off that team up north to land the Big Ten's top class for the sixth straight year. OSU raided the ESPN 300 to tap its next Bosa defensive end (Nick, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; No. 3) and heirs apparent for RB Ezekiel Elliott: speedy Demario McCall (North Ridgeville, Ohio; No. 38) and powerful Antonio Williams (New London, N.C.; No. 148).



Nick Bosa

6 MICHIGAN

In his first full recruiting cycle, Jim Harbaugh landed 15 ESPN 300 recruits—more than triple 2015's haul—headlined by the country's highest-ranked prep, DT Rashan Gary (Paramus, N.J.). Even more promising? The Wolverines' foothold in Florida: Three of their ESPN 300 signees call the Sunshine State home.

7 GEORGIA

For the first time in three years, the Dawgs' class does not claim a top-three in-state prospect. But across-the-line talent kept UGa in the top 10, with the No. 1 QB (Jacob Eason; Lake Stevens, Wash.; No. 13) and No. 1 TE (Isaac Nauta; Bradenton, Fla.; No. 8) both enrolling early—and ready to start on day one.

8 CLEMSON

Dabo Swinney has transformed the Tigers into an annual top-10 recruiting fixture, and in 2016 he was one of just three coaches in the nation to land three top-25 preps. DT Dexter Lawrence (Wake Forest, N.C.; No. 6) chose Clemson over Alabama, USC and Ohio State.

9 AUBURN

Down their top two pass catchers from '15 (Ricardo Louis, Melvin Ray), the Tigers needed to haul in receivers in the '16 class. All heading to the Plains: No. 2 WR Nate Craig-Myers (Tampa, Fla.; No. 37), No. 5 WR Kyle Davis (Lawrenceville, Ga.; No. 54) and No. 14 WR Eli Stove (Niceville, Fla.; No. 113).

10 TEXAS

The Longhorns won signing day, skyrocketing 22 spots on Feb. 3 to finish with a top-10 class. They brought in six ESPN 300 preps that day alone, headlined by the nation's second-ranked LB, Jeffrey McCulloch (Aldine, Texas; No. 26).

7
Bama jumped seven spots on signing day and landed its sixth straight recruiting class ranked top two in the nation.

NG NATION

Bama ousted! Michigan nipping at Ohio State's heels! Texas back from the dead! Signing day 2016 had a little bit of everything, so we turned to RecruitingNation to break down the teams that won Feb. 3 and the instant-impact freshmen who will win this fall. And since recruiting never sleeps, we look ahead to 2017 too.

BY GERRY HAMILTON AND CRAIG HAUBERT

11 USC

New coach Clay Helton turned a seemingly disappointing class—just 13 commits at the start of Feb. 3—into a near-top-10 group with a late flip from a Florida State pledge, S Jamel Cook (Miami; No. 73), and a surprise commit from onetime Georgia lock E.J. Price (Lawrenceville, Ga.; No. 90).

12 FLORIDA

Parlaying an SEC East title into a solid haul, the Gators nabbed a trio of top-30 wideouts, including signing-day flip Tyrie Cleveland (Houston; No. 52). That's huge for a team in need of a playmaking complement to WR Antonio Callaway.

13 STANFORD

The Cardinal's six total ESPN 300 recruits was the fewest of any team in the top 15, but David Shaw's commitment to national recruiting continues to reap rewards. Two of Stanford's three highest-ranked signees came from out of state: TE Kaden Smith (Flower Mound, Texas; No. 39) and OT Clark Yarbrough (Woodberry Forest, Va.; No. 119).

14 TENNESSEE

After two straight top-five classes for Butch Jones, the Vols dropped a tick to land the SEC East's third-best group. Still, a late push helped, especially a signing-day-eve pledge from the No. 1 ATH, Tyler Byrd (Naples, Fla.; No. 35).

15 UCLA

Four of the Bruins' nine ESPN 300 commitments came on Feb. 3, including LB Mique Juarez (Torrance, Calif.; No. 30). UCLA climbed four spots on signing day, the fourth-biggest jump among teams in the top 25.

16 NOTRE DAME

The offensive line, perhaps the Irish's primary recruiting need, looks golden for the future: OTs Liam Eichenberg (Cleveland; No. 67) and Tommy Kraemer (Cincinnati; No. 99) were Notre Dame's two highest-ranked preps.

17 BAYLOR

As is tradition in Waco, the Bears welcome a host of speedy playmakers at WR, led by Texas 100-meter state champ Devin Duvernay (Sachse, Texas; No. 42).

18 PENN STATE

James Franklin maintained his recruiting prowess in Year 2 with eight ESPN 300 athletes and perhaps the Lions' next great pass rusher, DE Shane Simmons (Hyattsville, Md.; No. 14). PSU joined Michigan and OSU as the only Big Ten teams to ink more than five blue chips.

19 MIAMI (FLA.)

The Canes surged after hiring Mark Richt in early December, landing DE Patrick Bethel (Vero Beach, Fla.; No. 111) on Dec. 14 and WR Ahmmon Richards (Wellington, Fla.; No. 212) on signing day.

20 TEXAS A&M

Despite their lowest recruiting finish since '11, the Aggies loaded up on D, with tackling-machine ATH Aaron Hansford (Washington, D.C.; No. 137) and DE Justin Madubuike (McKinney, Texas; No. 75).

21 OKLAHOMA

The Fresno-to-Norman pipeline continues to be fruitful for the Sooners, who cashed in on their 11-1 season for a big recruiting boost from California's Central Valley: the No. 7 OLB in the nation, Caleb Kelly.



Jacob Eason

22 MICHIGAN STATE

Mark Dantonio's tried-and-true formula—load up on three-stars [11 in 2016], with a smattering of ESPN 300 studs [four]—helped the Spartans to a top-25 finish, incredibly their first since our rankings began in '06.

23 TCU

Josh Doctson is off to the NFL, but the Horned Frogs worked fast to find their receivers of the future. Isaiah Graham (Bastrop, La.; No. 105) joins a pair of top-five ESPN JC 50 wideouts, Ryan Parker (Keller, Texas) and Taj Williams (Tallahassee, Fla.).

24 ARKANSAS

The Razorbacks secured their second top-25 class in as many years after missing the cut the prior three. Home-town product and 11th-ranked prep DE McTelvin Agim (Hope, Ark.), a terror in the trenches, provided the biggest boost.

25 ARIZONA STATE

Todd Graham's best get was WR N'keal Harry (Chandler, Ariz.; No. 22), but his out-of-state work pushed the Sun Devils into the top 25. ASU landed four-star recruits from five other states, led by QB Dillon Sterling-Cole (Houston; No. 205) and the nation's No. 2 center, Cohl Cabral (Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.; No. 199).

Tom Luginbill's Instant-Impact Freshmen

Remember the names of these 10 blue chips primed to make a big splash come fall.

1 DT Rashan Gary, Michigan

Hands down, Gary is the most important defensive freshman addition this year. He's an interior lineman who also gets to the QB—three sacks in the 2016 Under Armour All-America Game—a force reminiscent of current New York Jets DE Leonard Williams [USC]. Given Gary's rare size and quickness [6-4, 287; 4.86 40], plus his knack for disruptive impact, the Paramus, N.J., native will be in contention to start from day one.

2 DE Nick Bosa, Ohio State

The Buckeyes have major changes along the front after losing D-line stalwarts Tommy Schutt, Joel Hale and, most critically, Bosa's brother Joey. But if Nick performs half as well as his older brother did as a freshman [7½ sacks in 2013], Ohio State will be in good shape. He's already adept at getting to the QB [five sacks in seven games before tearing his right ACL as a senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.] and is more flexible at this stage than Joey.

3 CB Levonta Taylor, Florida State

Of all the true freshmen who have excelled right away in the secondary for FSU—Jalen Ramsey, Greg Reid, Ronald Darby, Lamaricus Joyner—none was as gifted a true cover guy as Taylor. He may not have great size [5-11, 183], but he can hold up on an island and make plays.

4 QB Jacob Eason, Georgia

Eason, the top-ranked pocket passer in 2016, looks destined to be thrown into the fire early by first-year coach Kirby Smart. Last year's starter, Greyson Lambert, returns after a solid 2015 campaign [67.6 QBR, No. 43 in the FBS in 2015], but Eason's prototypical size [6-6, 217] and enviable arm strength look too good to ignore. The good news for the true freshman is he'll be surrounded by experience that can help shoulder the load in Athens—14 starters return, including Heisman hopeful RB Nick Chubb.

5 C Baveon Johnson, Florida State

Given the shaky state of FSU's O-line—most glaring in the Noles' Peach Bowl loss to Houston, when it failed to open up holes for star RB Dalvin Cook [1.8 ypc]—Johnson not only projects to be a starter, he's in the mix at guard and center. He is arguably the most college-ready interior lineman of the past decade, thanks to his ability to control and stay in front of rushers once locked on and his outstanding strength and size [6-3, 340].

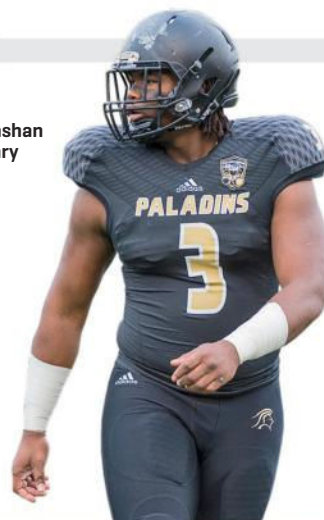
6 WR Devin Duvernay, Baylor

The Bears can never have enough pass catchers: Last year's standout, Corey Coleman, followed predecessors Terrance Williams, Kendall Wright and Josh Gordon to the NFL, and Duvernay looks to be next in line at Wide Receiver U. The Texas native will bring his blazing speed to Waco [4.38 40], which no one on Baylor's current roster possesses.

7 RB Demario McCall, Ohio State

With Ezekiel Elliott (and his 1,821 rush yards from 2015) off to the NFL, RB Curtis Samuel will likely assume the reins in the Ohio State backfield. But expect Samuel to get a boost—and a push—from McCall, who adds another dimension to the offense, not just from a depth standpoint but as a home run threat who can offer a much-needed change of pace. McCall doesn't have Samuel's speed but boasts physical toughness in a scatback's frame.

Rashan Gary



8 QB Feleipe Franks, Florida

The Gators won 10 games with since-transferred redshirt freshman Will Grier and middling sophomore Treon Harris [45.6 team QBR, No. 94 in '15]. Could a true freshman be an upgrade? A strong arm [35 TDs, 2 INTs last fall at Wakulla County in Crawfordville, Fla.] will give him a chance to beat out senior Austin Appleby and soph Luke Del Rio.

9 DE Jonathan Cooper, Ohio State

As a designated pass rusher, look for Cooper [6-3, 238] to take on a role similar to that of Florida State's Josh Sweat, who was used as a situational player off the edge in 2015. That could provide the platform for Cooper to be brought along at a similarly slow pace throughout the season and allow him to use his speed to make plays on the perimeter.

10 DT Dexter Lawrence, Clemson

When Lawrence plays to his ability, he is the only recruit in this class comparable to Rashan Gary—a big man [6-5, 335] with an excellent combination of size, quickness and agility. If he comes close to producing like Christian Wilkins did for the Tigers as a freshman last year, he'll add yet another impact player at a value position for playoff hopeful Clemson.



Rashan Gary, the No. 1 prep, is Michigan's first top-ranked signee since our rankings began in 2006.

2017 ESPN 300 Top 25

Quick! Only eight months remain before signing day 2017 is upon us. Get an early read on next February's top-ranked prospects.

1 OT **Trey Smith**, Jackson, Tenn.
Undeclared

2 OT **Isaiah Wilson**, New York City
Undeclared

3 OLB **Jaelen Phillips**, Redlands, Calif.
UCLA

4 RB **Najee Harris**, Antioch, Calif.
Alabama

5 DE **Robert Beal**, Norcross, Ga.
Undeclared

6 ATH **Dylan Moses**, Bradenton, Fla.
Undeclared

7 DT **Marvin Wilson**, Houston
Undeclared

8 S **Jeffrey Okudah**, Grand Prairie, Texas
Undeclared

9 OT **Alex Leatherwood**, Pensacola, Fla.
Alabama

10 WR **DeAngelo Gibbs**, Suwanee, Ga.
Undeclared

2017 Recruiting Forecast

The First Family of College Football Another McCaffrey will enter the game in 2017—2,400 miles from his Heisman-finalist older brother.

When it came time for Dylan McCaffrey to commit, an unlikely person proved pivotal to the nation's top quarterback for 2017.

The 6-4, 195-pound pocket passer is the younger brother of Stanford's do-it-all Heisman favorite Christian, son of Super Bowl winner and former Cardinal great Ed and Stanford soccer alum Lisa. So naturally, Dylan turned to Grandma.

"Honestly, I've been a Michigan fan since I was little," McCaffrey says. "My grandma is a big Michigan fan. I could've always seen myself going there, and in the end I just went back to how I felt about Michigan as a kid."

Many believed Stanford would be his eventual landing spot because of his many ties to the Cardinal. But even if Stanford had offered, McCaffrey says he wanted to create his own story.

"It would be the best decision for my future to not just go somewhere I have a lot of family ties," he says.

UM gets a strong-armed, accurate pocket passer with polish (27 TDs, 4 INTs as a junior at Valor Christian in Highlands Ranch, Colo.) and a kindred spirit to future coach Jim Harbaugh.

"One thing that stands out with [Harbaugh's] career is that he loves to win," McCaffrey says. "And I see a lot of that in myself." —TOM VANHAAREN



Keyshawn Johnson Jr.

The Legacies Three more names that might ring a bell.

WR Hunter Rison

Ann Arbor, Mich.

ESPN 300 rank 270

This crisp route runner will follow father Andre, a five-time Pro Bowl WR, to East Lansing. Rison decommitted from Michigan State in November, then recommitted in April over the likes of Ohio State, Miami and Oklahoma.

WR Keyshawn Johnson Jr.

Calabasas, Calif.

ESPN 300 rank 273

The son and namesake of a three-time Pro Bowl WR, Keyshawn Jr. is a well-schooled wideout with good hands. He's Lincoln-bound, committing to Nebraska over USC [his father's alma mater], Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State.

QB Griffin Alstott

St. Petersburg, Fla.

ESPN 300 rank NR

Like his father, six-time Pro Bowl FB Mike Alstott, Griffin is physically impressive: He boasts a strong arm and the ability to make plays outside the pocket. Also like Dad? He has decided to play his college ball at Purdue.

The Early Birds The usual suspects are off to fast 2017 recruiting starts.

ALABAMA

Excluding his first year in Tuscaloosa, every Nick Saban-recruited class at Bama has finished in the top three in the nation. The Tide are rolling again in 2017, with commitments from the top RB in the country, Najee Harris (Antioch, Calif.; No. 4 in the ESPN 300), top-three OT Alex Leatherwood (Pensacola, Fla.; No. 9) and top-five pocket passer Jake Fromm (Warner Robins, Ga.; No. 102).

CLEMSON

In preparation for the post-Deshaun Watson era, Clemson already claims a pair of top-11 ESPN 300 pocket passers: Hunter Johnson (Brownsburg, Ind.; No. 50) and Chase Brice (Loganville, Ga.; No. 185).

MIAMI

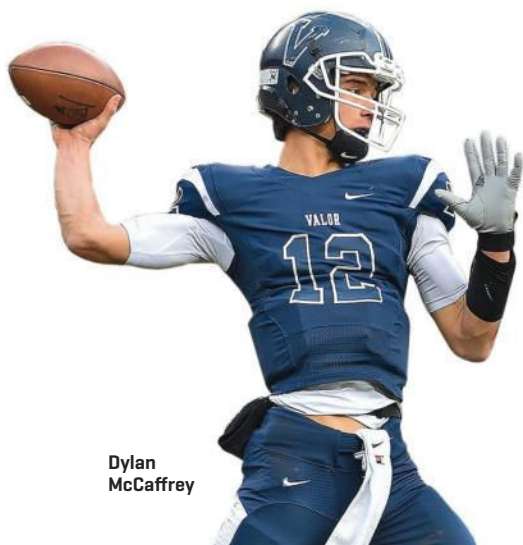
Mark Richt has continued the Canes' proclivity for early recruiting success: Four ESPN 300 commitments are headed to Coral Gables. And the talent is local, with eight preps total from the Miami area, including No. 6 RB Robert Burns.

OHIO STATE

The Buckeyes are well on their way to a seventh straight finish atop the Big Ten recruiting rankings, and they're getting it done in Florida. Three of the state's top 25 prospects are already on board, including the No. 1 cornerback and No. 3 safety in the 2017 class, Shaun Wade (Jacksonville, Fla.; No. 13) and Isaiah Pryor (Bradenton, Fla.; No. 46).

OKLAHOMA

The Sooners are seeking their first top-10 class since 2010, and so far much of Bob Stoops' success has come across the Red River. Four of OU's eight ESPN 300 commitments, including dual-threat QB Chris Robison (Mesquite, Texas; No. 248), are Lone Star prospects.



Dylan McCaffrey

11 S Richard LeCounte III, Hinesville, Ga.
Georgia

12 WR Donovan Peoples-Jones, Detroit
Undeclared

13 CB Shaun Wade, Jacksonville, Fla.
Ohio State

14 OT Austin Deculus, Cypress, Texas
Undeclared

15 WR Joseph Lewis, Los Angeles
Undeclared

16 OT Josh Myers, Miamisburg, Ohio
Ohio State

17 DT Tyler Shelvin, Crowley, La.
LSU

18 DE Joshua Kaindoh, Bradenton, Fla.
Undeclared

19 QB Dylan McCaffrey, Highlands Ranch, Colo.
Michigan

20 OT Calvin Ashley, Orlando, Fla.
Auburn

21 WR James Robinson IV, Lakeland, Fla.
Undeclared

22 ATH JaCoby Stevens, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Undeclared

23 RB Cam Akers, Clinton, Miss.
Undeclared

24 OT Foster Sarell, Graham, Wash.
Undeclared

25 CB Kary Vincent, Port Arthur, Texas
Undeclared

2017 NFL DRAFT

The lights have barely dimmed on the 2016 NFL draft, but Insider experts Mel Kiper Jr. and Todd McShay aren't ones for procrastination. They're already breaking down film of the next group of college stars ready to shine as top picks next spring.

MEL & TODD'S TOP NFL PROSPECTS TO WATCH*

QUARTERBACKS

Deshaun Watson
Jr., Clemson

Brad Kaaya
Jr., Miami (Fla.)

Mitch Leidner
Sr., Minnesota

RUNNING BACKS

Leonard Fournette
Jr., LSU

Dalvin Cook
Jr., Florida State

Christian McCaffrey
Jr., Stanford

WIDE RECEIVERS

JuJu Smith-Schuster
Jr., USC

Malachi Dupre
Jr., LSU

Mike Williams
Sr., Clemson

OFFENSIVE LINE

OT Cam Robinson
Jr., Alabama

OT Roderick Johnson
Jr., Florida State

OT Zach Banner
Sr., USC

DEFENSIVE LINE

DE Myles Garrett
Jr., Texas A&M

DE Jonathan Allen
Sr., Alabama

DT Malik McDowell
Jr., Michigan State

LINEBACKERS

OLB Tim Williams
Sr., Alabama

OLB Jarrad Davis
Sr., Florida

ILB Reuben Foster
Sr., Alabama

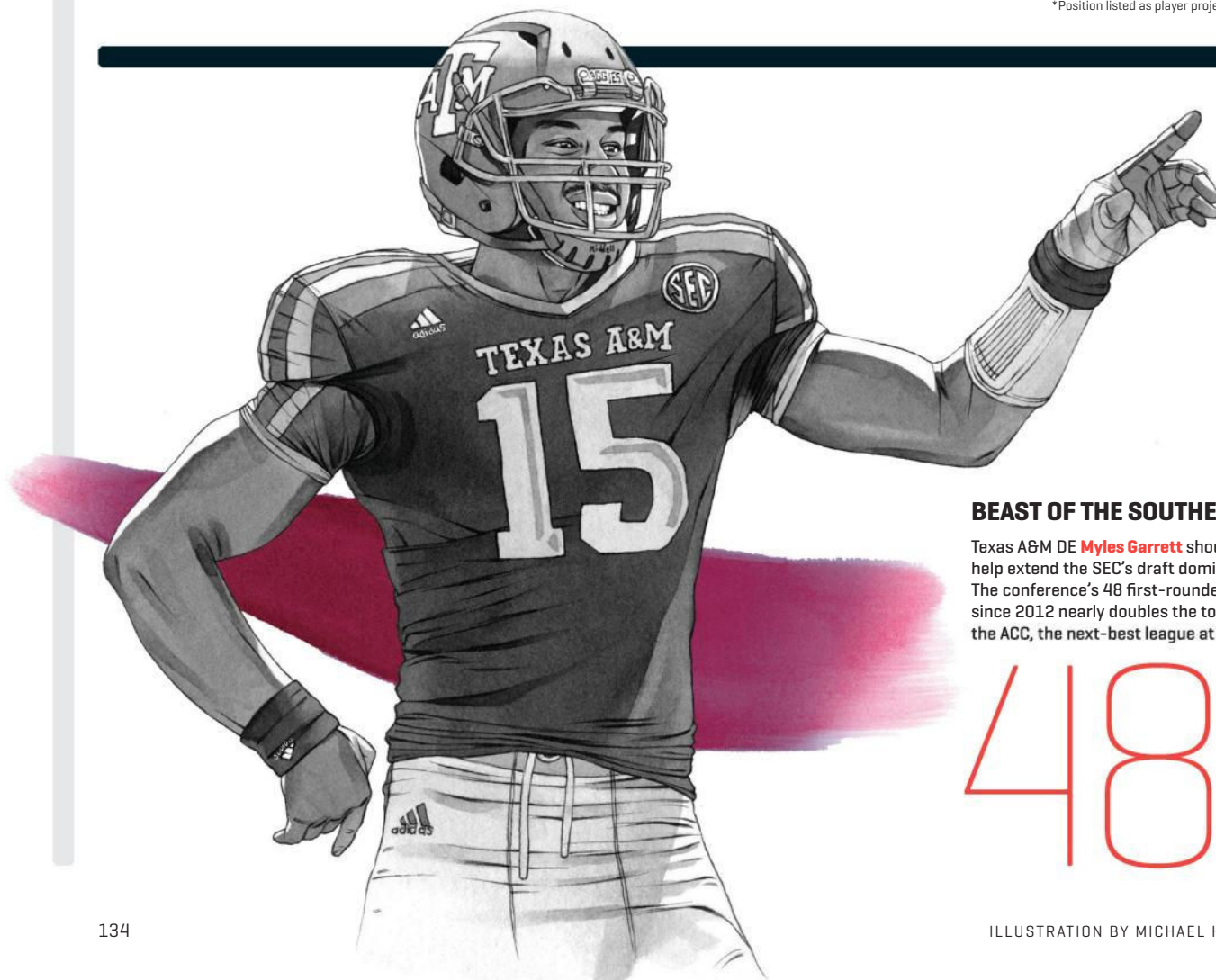
DEFENSIVE BACKS

SS Jabrill Peppers
So., Michigan

CB Jalen Tabor
Jr., Florida

FS Jamal Adams
Jr., LSU

*Position listed as player projects in the NFL.



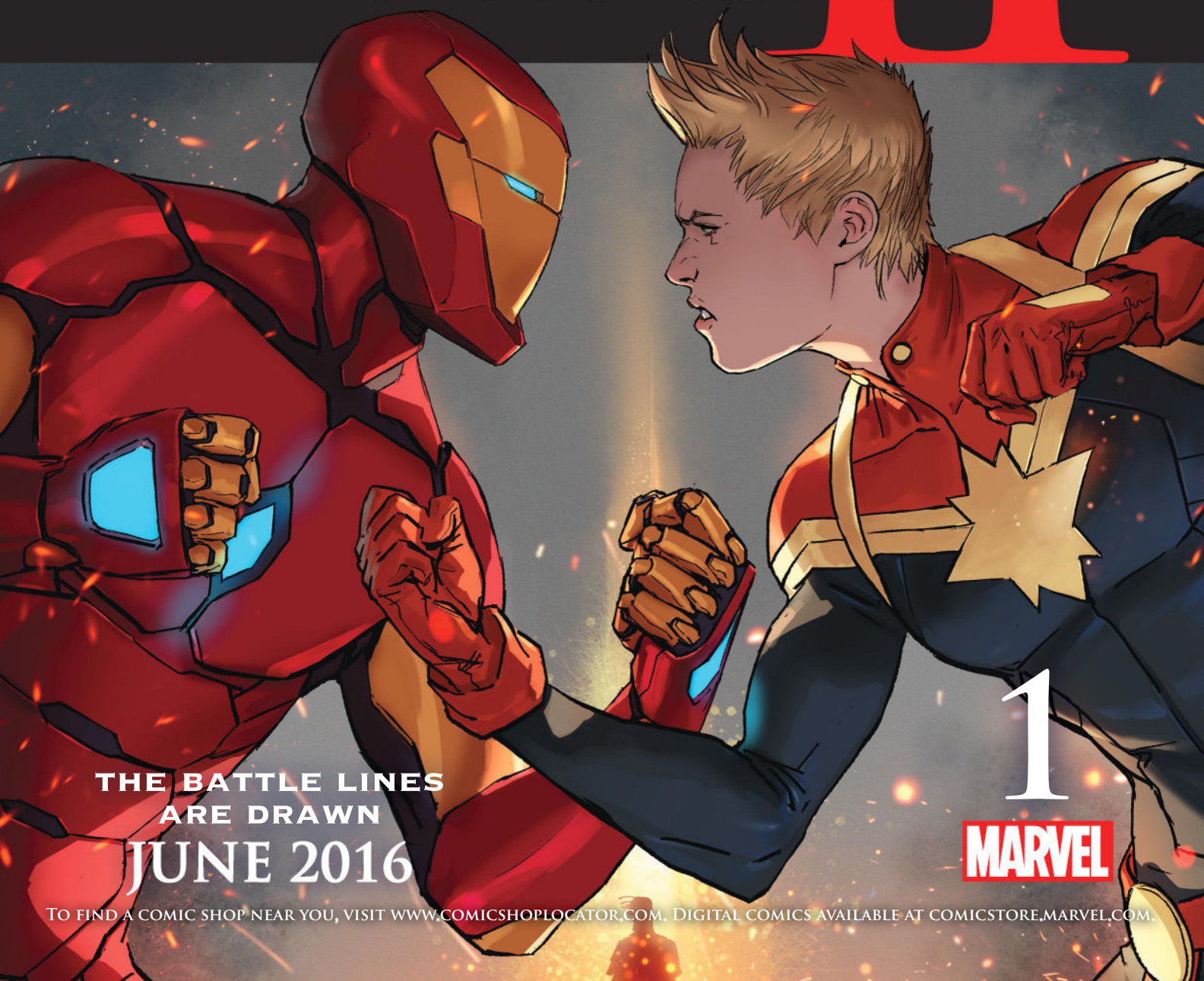
BEAST OF THE SOUTHEAST

Texas A&M DE **Myles Garrett** should help extend the SEC's draft dominance. The conference's 48 first-rounders since 2012 nearly doubles the total of the ACC, the next-best league at 27.

48

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ARE DRAWN
JUNE 2016

1

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*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

**EACH TEAM HAS
THEIR OWN ROAD
TO THE COLLEGE
FOOTBALL PLAYOFF.**

**AND THEY ALL BEGIN
LABOR DAY WEEKEND.**

LSU **vs.** WISCONSIN
ALABAMA **vs.** USC
OKLAHOMA **vs.** HOUSTON
CLEMSON **vs.** AUBURN
NOTRE DAME **vs.** TEXAS
NORTH CAROLINA **vs.** GEORGIA
OLE MISS **vs.** FLORIDA STATE

**WHO'S
IN
?**



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